



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

Capitol Report 2012

March 30, 2012

Filed by: Ben Wilcox, LWVF Governmental Consultant

Extraordinary Session Update

The Florida House of Representatives returned to Tallahassee this week to consider a redrawn Senate district map. The Senate approved the map a week ago. The plan needed to be approved by Wednesday which was the scheduled end of the extraordinary session which was called after the Florida Supreme Court invalidated the Senate's original map.

House leaders stood by their earlier "gentleman's" agreement with the Senate that each chamber would adopt the other chambers plan without changes. The Senate plan attempts to address ten issues identified in the state Supreme Court's decision to throw out the Senate's redistricting maps. The Court found that 8 of the Senate's 40 districts were invalid and did not meet the requirements of the Fair Districts' amendment five. It determined that the City of Lakeland had been unfairly split into two Senate districts when it could have been contained in one. It also found that the system the Senate used to number the districts was designed to favor incumbents and they ordered the Senate to renumber the districts.

In committee and again on the floor, House Democrats argued that the new Senate plan was as flawed as the first plan. There was also criticism from Republicans on the way the new plan handles minority districts. The Republicans, mostly Hispanic legislators from South Florida, complain that the Senate map unfairly packs Hispanics into three Republican-leaning districts while carving out a slim Hispanic majority in District 35, now held by Senator Gwen Margolis. They argue that if the districts were evened out, there could easily be four Hispanic seats, instead of the current three.

On the House floor, Democrats proposed an alternative to the Senate's map, but the amendment was defeated along party-lines by a 72 to 36 vote. The final vote on the Senate plan was closer, 61 to 47, because 11 Republicans, mostly Cuban-American, joined Democrats in opposition to the plan.

Unlike the first Senate map that pitted no incumbents against each other, the new Senate map has two incumbent Senators pitted against each other. Republican Senators, Andy Gardiner and David Simmons, are pitted against each other in an Orlando-based district. Senator Simmons has already said he plans to move and run in adjoining district.

The redistricting plan will now go back to the Supreme Court for its review. If the Court finds this second attempt fails to follow the guidelines of the Fair Districts amendments, it will be the responsibility of the Florida Supreme Court to draw the Senate districts for the next decade.

Get Involved!

Ben Wilcox is the League's professional lobbyist for the 2012 legislative session. Updates on League legislative issues will be provided on a regular basis through Capitol Report, which is published every week during the session. Important information may also be accessed at www.leg.state.fl.us.

Watch for your Capitol Report each Friday of the session for news on priority issues and what you can do to help. For updates on or copies of proposed legislation, call legislative information at 1-800-342-1827 or visit the Florida Online Sunshine homepage at www.leg.state.fl.us. For more information about the League's advocacy, check out www.TheFloridaVoter.org