



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA

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LWVF STATEMENT OF 2009 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES Marilynn Wills, ACTION

The LWVF board has selected Legislative Priorities for the 2009 Regular Session of the Florida Legislature. The priorities were selected using input from local Leagues, the LWVF Board and other sources. A summary statement of the LWVF's position on each priority is included.

Government: Promote an open government that is responsive to the people of the state.

Finance and Taxation: Support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.

Redistricting: Support single-member election districts that are equal in population, provide access for minorities, and are not determined by the Legislature.

Citizen Initiatives including the Statutory Initiative: Support citizens' right to have both constitutional and statutory initiatives.

Election Law: Promote integrity of process for matching voters to statewide data-base under HAVA; support automatic restoration of voting rights for felons who have been released from prison.

Education in Florida: Support for a free public school system for Florida with high standards for student achievement and with equality of education opportunity for all.

Funding: Support adequate funding for the public school system,

Accountability: Support a reliable accountability system that measures the achievement of all students whose education is provided by public expenditures.

Civics Education: Promote the extension of the civics education requirement.

Social Policy in Florida: Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice, and the health and safety of all Americans.

Health Care: Support a health care system that provides access to a basic level of quality health care for all Florida residents and controls health care costs.

GOVERNMENT IN FLORIDA

FINANCE AND TAXATION

The League supports a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.

Background:

After two special sessions devoted to taxation issues were held by the legislature in 2007, Senate President Pruitt was not willing to devote leadership assistance to any new tax bills during the 2008 session. However, House Speaker Rubio aggressively pursued his desire for deeper tax cuts during the session.

The League supported a bill aimed at closing loopholes in the Florida tax system that allow companies in Florida to assign business profits gained in Florida to other states, thereby avoiding Florida taxation. We strongly opposed Constitutional Proposal 45 (Tax & Budget Reform Commission), a bill that would restrict revenue growth and lead to a deterioration in public services. Colorado implemented this system in 2001 and has since put it on hiatus because of dwindling income. That state saw its K-12 funding go from 35 to 49 in the nation and its higher education budget declined by 31%. An attempt by the House Speaker to pass the same type of legislation died in the Senate. Currently, there is a proposed constitution amendment that provides that the total property tax on any parcel of real property shall never exceed 1.35% of the highest taxable value of the property. This property tax limit shall apply to all property taxes except property taxes approved by voters. This is a version of the Colorado law. It has been sent to the Supreme Court after approval by the Secretary of State.

None of the legislation proposed in 2008 or the constitutional amendments passed or proposed agree with League positions. We will continue to oppose legislation that is not responsive to public needs and work for real reform of the Florida tax system.

Legislative Position:

The LWVF will support tax legislation that:

- Focuses more on ability to pay
- Does not jeopardize local services
- Addresses Florida's infrastructure deficit
- Enhances Floridian's quality of life
- Removes unfair tax exemptions that hinder the State's or local governments' ability to serve Floridians.

The LWVF will oppose tax legislation that:

- Does not provide true, fair tax relief to Floridians
- Further burdens the State's or local governments' ability to serve Floridians

REDISTRICTING

The LWVF supports single-member election districts that are equal in population, that provide access for minorities, are compact and, when possible, take local characteristics such as political and geographical boundaries into consideration.

Background:

While redistricting suffered a setback when the amendment was stricken from the ballot by the Florida Supreme Court, the court did establish guidelines for compliance. Many of the groups in the original coalition have joined Fair Districts Florida in a new petition drive. The Supreme Court heard arguments for and against the amendment on Thursday, November 6; we are awaiting their decision. Local Leagues have been getting petitions signed throughout the past year.

Legislative Position:

While a bill to require redistricting was listed among the Senate bills in 2008, it did not have a hearing.

The LWVF will support redistricting legislation that:

- Would depoliticize the redistricting process by setting statewide standards
- Provides an equitable process for redistricting
- Establishes a process that supports true representation for minorities

The LWVF will oppose redistricting legislation that:

- Further politicizes the redistricting process
- Fails to allow minority representation

INITIATIVES

The LWVF supports citizens' right to have both constitutional and statutory initiatives.

Background:

In 1968 the Constitution Revision Commission placed a citizen petition initiative procedure on the ballot; it passed. The LWVF supported the amendment and feels that Florida should have both constitutional and statutory initiatives available to its citizens.

After the 2006 session, representatives from the League, Common Cause and FPIRG met with the attorneys for the Senate Judiciary Committee and discussed the statutory initiative. We were hopeful that a bill would be introduced in the 2007 session; however, a good deal of the session was devoted to tax reform with no results. There was very little time left in the session to address all other issues. We did not see any movement in the 2008 session, but hopefully, we will see some stirrings in the 2009 legislative session.

Legislative Position:

For the past three sessions, the League has fought to keep restrictions on the initiative process from passing. The legislature was successful in getting the 60% amendment on the ballot, and it passed. The revocation process was put in place, and while we were trying to amend it, it was struck down in the Appeals Court. The status at this time is unknown.

The LWVF will support initiative legislation that:

- Creates a statutory initiative process
- Puts the same restrictions on Legislative sponsored constitutional amendments that are on citizen amendments

The LWVF will oppose initiative legislation that:

- Keeps the revocation process in the hands of third party groups
- Increases moneyed interests' strangle-hold on the initiative process

EDUCATION IN FLORIDA

After the 2007 convention, an education committee was formed to study education and the FCAT in Florida. No concurrence was reached on a previous study done in 2005. The new study is to focus on accountability systems measuring student achievement. Legislators attempted to reduce the influence of the FCAT scores on the grading of schools during the 2008 legislative session. There was a large education bill passed during the last session, but there were other bills that would modify use of the FCAT that never made it out of committee. We may see more activity along those lines during the 2009 session.

The League will support legislation that:

- Supports a reliable accountability system for measuring achievement of all students
- Supports high standards for teacher certification and compensation
- Supports equality of educational opportunity for all

The League will oppose legislation that:

- Decreases the role of the state in funding of the public school system
- Does not fully finance programs mandated by the state

CIVIC EDUCATION

The LWVF seeks to restore the historic civic mission of our schools. The key to strengthening civic education is improving state and local policy support for it. For our system of representative democracy to be healthy, we need citizens who understand what it means to participate in governing themselves, actually engage in that self-governance, have the knowledge to do it well, and appreciate the complexities of the process and understand how it works.

Background:

The League of Women Voters of Florida has made civic education a legislative priority for the last three sessions. During the 2006 session, LWVF joined Common Cause and succeeded in getting a semester of civic education required at the middle school level. We supported a bill during the 2007 session that would include the teaching of civic education in the teacher preparatory curriculum. Former Senator Bob Graham and former Representative Lou Frey promoted a bill that would require civic education be added to the FCAT. The rationale for this requirement is that subjects not tested are usually given short shrift in the classroom.

There are two school districts in Florida that require a year long civics course in the middle school: Miami-Dade and Palm Beach. The LWVF would like to see that requirement extended to all school districts in Florida.

Legislative Position:

As indicated at least one bill on this issue has already been filed for the upcoming Session.

The LWVF will support civic education legislation that:

- Requires civic education in middle school
- Enhances high school civic education requirements
- Adds civic education to the FCAT

The LWVF will oppose civic education legislation that:

- Hinders civic education at any level.

FINANCING AND DELIVERY OF HEALTHCARE

During the 2008 legislative session, the League joined with other groups like AARP, FPIRG, and the Florida Retail Federation to promote SB1486, the “Health Care Consumer’s Right to Information Act.” The bill was filed by Senator Dean and its companion bill in the House by Representative Zapata.

Passed by the legislature in 2008, the bill will take transparency an important step forward. The **Health Care Consumer’s Right to Information Act** will make it easier for Floridians to get advance estimates and compare prices when they are deciding where to go for their non-emergency health care needs. The bill increases transparency by:

- Requiring disclosure of undiscounted prices for the 150 most common procedures.
- Directing the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to post those prices on the Floridahealthfinder.gov website
- Requiring advance, written good-faith estimates for non-emergency hospital care.
- Requiring estimates to be written in language comprehensible to the layperson
- Requiring facilities to provide uninsured patients with information regarding any discount or charity policies
- Requiring providers to inform patients covered under Medicare and Medicaid whether their coverage will be accepted as payment in full
- Directing AHCA to include the range of procedure charges from the highest to the lowest charge rather than only the average charge when determining the information to disclose on the Floridahealthfinder.gov website

LWVF will continue to work with the Health Check Coalition on health issues and providing health care to all citizens of Florida. This is an issue that should be broached to all legislators during interviews.