



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA

540 Beverly Court, Tallahassee, FL 32301-2506

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**2009 LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEWS PACKET**  
**Marilynn Wills, ACTION**

**PURPOSE of LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEWS:** Local opportunities for face-to face contact:

- To acquaint your legislators with your local League(s) and members in their district.
- To inform your legislators of and about the LWVF 09 legislative priorities.
- To obtain information for the LWVF professional and volunteer lobbyists.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

- Make an appointment to meet with your legislators in person. You may call on any legislator serving your local League area with the understanding that another League served by the same legislator may also interview him/her.
- Choose those questions that you think are most relevant to your locale even though most of the suggested questions apply to all legislators
- Prior to the scheduled appointment, if requested, send a copy of the LWVF Legislative Priorities, the selected questions, and the background information to the legislator. (Additional LWVF positions and background is available in *Study and Action 2007-2009*, a LWVF publication.)
- Alternatively, or in addition to, schedule a presentation at your Legislative Delegation public hearing (s) with their constituents. If you are making a presentation to the entire county delegation, please coordinate with other Leagues served by legislators in that county. Plan to leave a copy of the LWVF 09 Legislative Priorities and relevant background information with each member of the delegation. Please remember that only the local League President or their designees may speak in the name of the League.
- If you cannot get an appointment due to scheduling conflicts, you may ask your legislator to fill in the questionnaire for collection by a League member or for mailing to your local League.
- Return the completed form for legislative interview questions as provided herein by **February 15, 2009**. The 2009 session begins on March 3, 2009.

**PACKET CONTENTS:**

- Instructions
- Form for Legislative Interview Completed Questions
- Legislative Interview Questions by LWVF 2009 Legislative Priority
- LWVF Statement of 2009 Legislative Priorities
- Individual LWVF position statements and background information for each 2009 legislative priority



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**COVER SHEET FOR LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - 2009 SESSION**

**NOTE: the responses to these questions are for the use of LWVF only and will not be released to the media or the general public.** Although space has been provided on the form, additional pages may be attached to allow room for answers.

**Legislator's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **H or S District** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Recorder:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**League of Women Voters of:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make sure the Legislator's name and appropriate district appear on each sheet.**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please e-mail, fax, or mail these forms, **by February 15, 2009**, to the name below:

**LWVF  
c/o Peg McGarity  
540 Beverly Court  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
[lwf1@comcast.net](mailto:lwf1@comcast.net)**

If you are using a format other than a direct interview with one legislator, please list the name of the forum, date, and names of legislators and their responses

**Name of Forum** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Legislators in Attendance** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Questions Asked** (State the selected question(s)) and **Responses Given** (Name the legislator and district; give his/her response to the selected question(s)).

**The following are questions submitted by League members around the state. *You may use as many as you like in your legislative interviews.* If you have specific related concerns that affect your area of the state, feel free to ask those also.**

## **Government in Florida**

### **FINANCE AND TAXATION**

The LWVF believes that the state of Florida has an infrastructure deficit, that state service levels and the quality of life are declining as a result, and that sufficient state revenues should be collected to meet these needs.

Do you support tax reform that increases Florida revenues sufficiently to meet the needs of Floridians for essential services? If so, how would you accomplish this?

Florida's present taxation system is inequitable because it taxes people with low-income at a much higher rate than people with higher income levels.

Do you support tax reform that would distribute the tax burden more equitably? If so, how would you accomplish this?

The current taxing system in Florida allows multi-state corporations to artificially shift income earned in Florida to their subsidiaries in states that are tax havens. The Florida Center for Fiscal & Economic Policy estimates the cost to Florida at \$364 million annually. Smaller businesses and Florida-only businesses pay taxes on all of their income.

How would you address this differential taxation?

What is your position on the Central Florida Commuter Rail project, and please explain?

Would you support additional funding for public transportation in Florida either by redirecting existing revenue or creating new sources of revenue? Why or why not.

What benefits or detriment do you see the CRT project bringing to the state of Florida?

What action(s) are you prepared to take to increase funding of public transportation in Florida?

### **ELECTION REFORM**

Florida just received a report card grade of “C” from Common Cause/The Century Foundation in its Fall 2008 Study/report: “Voting in 2008: Ten Swing States”. Florida received unsatisfactory scores in the categories of voter registration, rejection, registration, notification, 3<sup>rd</sup> party registrations, voter identification, votes cast in wrong precinct, voter suppression/challenges...just to name a few. As the fourth largest state in the Union,

What will you do to ensure that Florida becomes a leader in making voting as universally available as possible? Please specify the areas in which you think it is most important to make improvements.

### **REDISTRICTING**

What standards for drawing voting districts in Florida do you think should be followed to allow all citizens the opportunity to elect representatives of their choice?

## **INITIATIVES**

The League agrees that many citizen initiatives do not belong in Florida's Constitution; however, the League does believe that the direct access to the government process provided by initiative is an important check and balance in our system. Would you support or oppose a Citizens' Statutory Initiative Process? Please give your reasons.

## **EDUCATION**

With Florida's education system currently ranked at the bottom of national measures, how do you propose to raise sufficient revenue to meet the "paramount duty of the state to make adequate provision for the education of all children", as established in Article IX of the Florida Constitution?

We now have one semester of civics required in the middle school curriculum. Would you be in favor of increasing this requirement to one year?

## HEALTH CARE

Due to the revenue reductions, the state budget spending for social programs and healthcare has been cut back dramatically.

Do you believe there is a need to restore funding for essential social and healthcare programs? Why or why not?

If you believe there is a need to restore funding:

1. How would you propose to do this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What social and healthcare programs should be restored?

Florida has 3.8 million uninsured or under-insured citizens. Please discuss your strategies for remedying this situation.



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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.