

## Summary of Legislative addition to Fair Districts Amendments

THE CAPITAL, TALLAHASSEE, April 30, 2010...Helped by a pair of black Democrats, Senate Republicans successfully added a proposed redistricting amendment to the November ballot Friday which opponents say will undermine two other proposals designed to loosen the GOP's grip on the Florida Legislature.

The 25-14 vote largely broke along party lines. Senate Republicans said the additional measure (HJR 7231) will "complement" the so-called FairDistricts group's Amendments 5 and 6, which made it to the ballot following a signature-campaign financed mostly by Democratic-allied organizations.

The FairDistricts measures would prohibit the Legislature from drawing legislative or congressional districts aimed at helping an incumbent or political party, while also urging that "compact" districts be formed.

House and Senate Republicans, however, warn those ballot proposals threaten minority voter access and have advanced the additional measure to allow lawmakers to maintain "communities of interest" when they draw new political boundaries in 2012. They also say they need to make sure minority districts are protected.

If those standard are added, critics say it could result in a disproportionate number of mostly Democratic-leaning, black voters pushed into a handful of districts, diminishing Democratic voting strength in surrounding districts.

Democratic Sens. Gary Siplin of Orlando and Al Lawson of Tallahassee sided with the Republican majority. **Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland, Sen. Rudy Garcia, R-Hialeah, and Sen. Alex Villalobos, R-Miami were the only Republicans to vote against the measure, which was pushed by incoming Senate President Mike Haridopolos, R-Merritt Island.**

"It's obviously intended to emasculate Amendments 5 and 6," said Sen. Dan Gelber, D-Miami Beach. "It will thoroughly gut those other amendments and I don't think that's what the people want us to do."

But Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton, challenged claims that the FairDistricts measure were motivated purely by a drive to improve government, pointing out that such Democratic allies as the Service Employees International Union and Florida Education Association helped finance the more than \$2 million campaign.

"There's your grassroots campaign, folks," Bennett told senators.

The Senate's action followed a similar, mostly party-line vote in the House and sends the measure to the ballot. Proposed constitutional amendments approved by the Legislature are not subject to veto by the governor.

The amendments must be approved by 60 percent of voters to take effect.

The 2012 redistricting could prove pivotal to both Democrats and Republicans. While registered Democratic voters outnumber Republicans in Florida by some 700,000 voters, district lines in 1992 and 2002 helped Republicans capture two-thirds of the state's congressional delegation and dominate the state House and Senate.

"These legislators claims that their additional amendment is needed to `clarify' provisions of the FairDistricts amendments. But that claim is deceptive," said Ellen Friedin, FairDistricts' campaign chair. "They are just trying to hold onto their power."

