



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

Media Release - Legislative Wrap-up

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Florida's Gladiators: Just Who is the Legislature Fighting For ?

All across America, states are facing tough decisions - reducing deficits, protecting essential services, running government more efficiently, coming up with new ideas to bring jobs and visitors to their states. What did we learn from our Legislative Session that just ended days ago? Is there any sign of a vision, strategic plan or thoughtful collaborative partnership to take on our citizen's challenges?

With few exceptions, the most recent session resembled a match in the Roman Coliseum between the majority leadership of Florida versus Florida citizens. Let's look at the aftermath:

- With almost 100% re election of incumbents, legislators still felt the need to protect their jobs. They placed their own redistricting amendment on this November's ballot that would nullify the state wide citizen gathered Fair Districts amendments (numbers 5 and 6) if adopted. Using taxpayer money, they hired lawyers to draft an amendment that newspapers called a 'sham', 'shameful', 'arrogant'. Despite its name and confusing legalese, the Legislature's amendment would in effect cancel out the citizens Fair Districts amendments 5 and 6 and would have the effect of returning us to our current way of politicians picking their voters, splitting communities apart, creating confusion, and leaving parties in charge of our elections.
- Without closing obvious tax loopholes benefiting cigarette companies, special interests, and large corporations, the legislature passed a state budget that slashes funding for prenatal care for poor women, child abuse prevention and other critical human services. Instead of a thoughtful collaborative approach, legislators raided trust funds and expanded Indian gambling to find money for special last minute earmarks like tax breaks for yachts, private airplanes and tickets to professional sporting events.
- The legislature passed a bill that would create new campaign fund raising accounts for

legislative leaders allowing unlimited contributions at any time, even during the legislative session. It was a blatant attempt to legitimize "pay to play" and would have given wealthy special interests a new way to influence public policy. Governor Crist wisely saw fit to veto that bill.

- The legislature revamped our teacher evaluation and compensation plan basing it on an undeveloped and unfunded reliance on standardized tests, never soliciting input from teachers, principals, or stakeholders. This unpopular bill would have ended the recognition of degrees held, or special teacher training. Again, Governor Crist vetoed the bill.
- While Florida's citizens have the stunningly third worst rate of citizens without health insurance, legislators worked themselves into a frenzy passing a law to thwart the Federal health care legislation which would require citizens to have some health care coverage. Instead the legislature spent its last several days devoting late hours to requiring women in their first trimester of pregnancy to pay for and undergo an ultrasound before they can have an abortion.

Expand health coverage to rural and low income citizens? No way...a bill that would have allowed nurse practitioners to prescribe medicine, a move that could have vastly expanded health care access, while reducing cost (Alabama and Florida are the only two states that do not permit this) never made it out of the healthcare committee for a vote. Our state legislature was too busy spending its time passing laws to increase costs and intrude in women's health care decisions.

Additionally with huge citizen unrest over lack of control over growth, Legislators refused to re authorize and protect the Department of Community Affairs, the agency that has shown itself to be a good protector of sound growth policy in the state. On a positive note, we did see a glimmer of bipartisanship as a bill to require a semester of civics for middle school students was passed, as well as a step forward in water management and requirements for ensuring septic tanks are monitored.

While Florida is in dire need of some bipartisan long range vision and planning, unfortunately we are unlikely to see this in a major election year. We'll need to wait until 2011 for signs of true fiscal vision and reform by Florida Legislative Leadership.

The League of Women Voters urges all citizens to cast an informed vote! Make sure your voice is heard by ensuring your voter registration is up to date. Get the facts for Election Year 2010. Visit www.VoteAnywhere.org to register, update, and find out the three ways you can cast your vote.