



TO PROMOTE POLITICAL
RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH
INFORMED AND ACTIVE
PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN
GOVERNMENT AND TO ACT ON
SELECTED GOVERNMENT ISSUES

THE VOTER

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF TALLAHASSEE

www.lwvtallahassee.org

850-309-3005

TALLAHASSEE

VOLUME 19–NUMBER 4

APRIL 2011

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

6 April 1:30 p.m.

Education Committee
2423 Shalley Dr.

13 Wednesday 4:00 p.m.

Tallahassee City Commission
City Hall 2nd floor

12 Tuesday 3:00 p.m.

Leon County Commission
County Courthouse 5th floor

12 Tuesday 6:30 p.m.

LWVT Board Meeting
LWVF Office, Beverly Court

12 Tuesday 6:00 p.m.

Leon County School Board
Howell Center
3955 W. Pensacola Street

16 Saturday 10:30 a.m.

Annual Meeting
Holiday Inn Conference Center
2725 Graves Road

18 Monday 1:00 p.m.

CRTPA Retreat

26 Tuesday, 6:00 p.m.

Leon County Commission
County Courthouse 5th floor

27 Wednesday 4:00 p.m.

City Commission Meeting
City Hall

28 Wednesday 3:00 p.m.

Health Care Committee
2299 Trescott Dr.

ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 16, 2011

LOCAL GOVERNMENT–WILL IT SURVIVE IN FLORIDA????

If you have been following the 2011 legislative session, you are probably asking yourself this question. Our city and county commissions must be doing so; local governments will be facing some hard times if all the cuts to the state budget are approved. The legislature has predicted many cuts, but there has been no talk of raising revenues.

We have asked County Commission Chairman John Dailey to discuss just how the drastic state budget cuts will impact Leon County.



Time: 10:00 a.m.

Place: Holiday Inn & Suites Conference Center
2725 Graves Road

Lunch: Roasted Herb Marinated Chicken Breast, Mushroom Ragout, Saffron Rice, Salad, Dessert & Beverage included

Cost: \$20.00 payable at the door
Please call the LWVT voice mail, 309-3005, by Tuesday, April 12 to make reservations



Since the League has to pay for all meals ordered, cancellations received after the deadline will be billed for the cost of the lunch.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Spring is here and just in time for the LWVF Legislative Seminar and Convention. Many of our Tallahassee League members attended and worked at this event for four days in March. Mayor John Marks welcomed Leaguers to Tallahassee, Tallahassee League member Carol Weissert addressed the group at our Saturday lunch, and Tallahassee League member and newly elected Circuit Court Judge Karen Gievers swore in our new State Board.



I would like to thank all Tallahassee League members for allowing me to serve as your president this past two years. It is a pleasure to work with our members because they are so well-informed and knowledgeable about state and local issues.

It's April, and that means the Downtown Market is in full swing. We need members at the market every Saturday morning to register voters, distribute our "Know Your Public Officials" brochure, give out information about local issues, and recruit new members. It's just three or four hours on a Saturday morning and a good way to get the League message out to the public. In addition to providing a service to the community, it's a "fun" experience. Check your schedule, and find a Saturday when you can help. Just send an e-mail to Peggy Ramsey or Marilyn Wills.

Interested in transportation in our area?? If you are, then please sign up for our state Transportation study. Send me an e-mail: marilynnwills@msn.com

There will be two more Cuba trips this year; one in May and another in October. If you are interested in traveling to Cuba with other Florida League members, please let me know. I will forward the information to the State Board.

Thank you to members of our Lobby Corps who are attending committee meetings at the Capitol and forwarding important information to our LWVF lobbyist; things are moving fast and furiously this session, and Lobby Corps members are a great help.

Representatives Rehwinkel-Vasilinda and Williams spoke to Legislative Seminar attendees in the Cabinet Room on Thursday morning, and we were proud to announce that they are both members of the League of Women Voters of Tallahassee.

We celebrated the passage of Amendments 5 and 6 during Legislative Seminar; however, there is still a great deal of work ahead of us on these issues. Our first hurdle is to get the amendments to the Justice Department; they must be cleared by the Justice Department to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Voting Rights Act. Governor Charlie Crist submitted them to the Department before he left office, but Governor Rick Scott withdrew them from the Justice Department upon entering office. The League is working with FairDistrictsNow to ensure that redistricting does happen in a timely fashion before the 2012 election.

HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE

We celebrated the Affordable Care Act one year anniversary during the month of March. HCC members attended the press conference hosted by the Human Services Coalition (Catalyst Miami), Florida PIRG and Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy on the steps of the Capitol to support the benefits of the ACA. Florida CHAIN reported in their March 25 email "ACA Anniversary Week in Review" that a cake was delivered to Attorney General Pam Bondi to celebrate the ACA's birthday.

An excellent overview of the preliminary efforts to establish a single-payer health care solution in Vermont can be found at www.nejm.org (March 17, 2011, in the *Perspective* section, "State-Based, Single-Payer Health Care--A Solution for the United States?") William C. Hsiao, Ph.D., author of the article and a member of the team of health system analysts at the Harvard School of Public Health commissioned by the Vermont Legislature "to develop and evaluate three options for health system reform and determine which option would best achieve the stated goals" (pg. 1), describes their findings and solution in a very readable format.

A healthy lifestyle round table discussion focusing on mental health was hosted by Chi Theta Zeta (local chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc). Dr. Melvena Wilson, Second Vice President of the Chapter, FSU health educator and member of the Unnatural Causes (racial disparities) team, invited our participation. Local professionals in the medical and counseling fields attended and presented on mental health issues, with focus on added risks to African Americans. The goal is for this local group to continue to meet and work together to reach the youth, men and women who are in need.

The LWVFL Capitol reports filed by Ben Wilcox, Governmental Consultant, have provided great overviews of the status of the bills of concern to our committee. Legislation on Medicaid, health reform and women's reproductive rights are being monitored. These reports are sent by email to League members each week during the legislative session. Please take the time to read them and take action when requested. A special thank you to our member Kathy Winn for following the Medicaid reform legislation. Health Care Committee will meet on March 31 and April 28.

Theresa Chase

HEALTH CARE IN CUBA

When the Florida League traveled to Havana, Cuba in February, one of our stops included a visit to a Health Clinic where there was a presentation about programs such as maternal-child, breast cancer prevention, cervical cancer prevention, prostate cancer prevention, healthy living and nutrition.

We were met by Pediatrician Dr. Julio Roge and the Deputy Director of the Clinic.

Dr Roge, who speaks English, explained how the Health System works in Cuba.

Their system has evolved over the years. The program began after the Revolution. In 1960 they began rural medical services, developing a program to combat infectious diseases. In 1964, the integral clinic came about where integrated services began; this evolved into the community clinic in 1974 and the Family doctor/nurse program in 1984.

The whole family is seen by the same doctor. The premises of this current transformation:

- Outreach services to the population
- Adequate services to the health situation of each province, and customized service
- Human resources development
- Improvement and introduction of new technologies.

They attempt to provide services closer to the patient and comprehensive health care to the family using analysis of the health status of same; they are concerned with the total health care of the family. The country is divided up into these communities where there may be up to 15,000 in the group. 66% of the people live within 350 meters of the doctor's office. This includes the mountain and rural areas. No citizen may be excluded from health services, and there is no limit on sick days. Specialists come to the clinics on a weekly basis.

Doctors may use a combination of natural and manufactured medicine. They are working on nutrition and are trying to promote eating salads and vegetables; there is a mind set among many Cubans that eating vegetables means you are poor, so they reject the idea. Portions of food are also rather large. Re-education on diet is needed. Doctor Roge feels that the media should be forced to work on this re-education.

The life expectancy is 75 years; like many countries in the world, Cuba has an aging population.

cont'd CUBA p. 4

There is no fetal alcohol syndrome; diabetes is a problem; respiratory problems are #1 for pediatricians. Currently, there is an anti-smoking law in Cuba. (It must not be enforced, since they smoke cigars in all the bars). Havana experiences a higher respiratory ailment for children.

In the mental health area, the family doctor makes the diagnosis, the patient is referred to a psychiatrist or psychologist; there are mental health centers where there is consultation and group therapy. Every hospital has a mental ward.

Dental services are free; there were several dentists in the clinic we visited. People are free to go to any clinic or hospital, including the emergency room.

There is a national program for early detection of cervical cancer; however, some women refuse to be tested since they don't feel ill. Women are more accepting of having mammograms than the tests for cervical cancer.

Cuba also has a national immunization program and 100% of their children have been vaccinated. Dr. Roge received all of his medical education in Cuba; it was paid for by the government. Cubans do not pay for health care.



“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.



EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Education Committee met on March 6. We began with a discussion of SB 0736, the Student Success Act, and its companion HB 7019, that have been signed into law by the Governor.

The bill essentially makes into law the changes that have been under way since the state accepted the Federal Race to the Top Grant money. The changes mandated by the bill have been being implemented since 2010 when the grant began. This money will have been used up by the end of 2014 and with this new law the responsibility for continuing to fund these changes will become Florida's, making this bill essentially an unfunded mandate. Time will tell whether the legislature and Florida voters will raise the revenue to continue implementation of the changes mandated by the bill. They do not have a good track record on doing that.

To create, test, and put into practice the kind of teacher and principal evaluations that they have mandated will cost millions of dollars and should take at least five years to create, test, and put into place. To do it well, more time than that will probably be needed. If the plan is well done and teachers believe it to be fair, they will accept the plan. If not, it will go the way of previous merit pay plans for teachers; it will fail. We can only hope that it will work out well for students and teachers and that Florida voters will be willing to pick up the tab for this very ambitious and expensive program.

These funds will largely go out of the state. It is usual for testing of this sort to be developed by companies that are not based in Florida.

M. L. Baker

OBAMA URGES FEWER SCHOOL EXAMS

President Obama said Monday that students should take fewer standardized tests and school performance should be measured in other ways than just exam results.

“Too often what we have been doing is using these tests to punish students or to, in some cases, punish schools,” he told students and parents at a meeting hosted by the Univision Spanish-language television network at Bell Multicultural High School in Washington D. C.

Obama, who wants a rewrite of the nation's education law to ease some of its rigid measurement tools, said policymakers should find a test that “everybody agrees makes sense” and administer it every few years instead of annually. He also said schools should be judged on other criteria such as attendance rates.

from [Newsline](#). Tuesday, March 29, 2011 in the *Tallahassee Democrat*.

I wish these non-educator education experts would make up their minds and let the educators have enough time to see if they can find out what is really going on in the schools, both successful and failing ones. Then perhaps we could fix some things.

Editor's Comment

HIGHLIGHTS OF SEMINAR AND CONVENTION

While there was not time to do some in-depth reporting on this mega-event, here are some highlights: We started out with a bang with the Fair Districts Dinner at the top of the Capitol where Ellen Freidin was honored for leading the successful campaign for redistricting in Florida.

On Thursday morning we heard from a number of legislators as well as the new secretary of the Department of Community Affairs, Billy Buzzett. After a lunch and briefing by Ben Wilcox, LWVF lobbyist, Leaguers met with their legislators at the Capitol.

After an afternoon of lobbying their legislators, Leaguers met for the Old Capitol Gala in the Senate Chambers of the Historic Old Capitol. State Senator Lynn, LWVUS President Elizabeth MacNamara and Grace Nelson, wife of Senator Bill Nelson, addressed the crowd, The food was wonderful and so was the music.

On Friday, we started convention. We adopted a new program, budget, bylaws changes and celebrated the accomplishments of local Leagues. On Friday evening, we celebrated the renovations at the League House with a barbecue at the House. Former legislator Bob McKnight addressed the gathering and sold many copies of his books. The Tallahassee League received an award for overall gains in League membership for 2010-2011 and a second award for the work we do as the Tallahassee League, including the work of our Lobby Corps; the second award is a copy of a poster that was placed in windows by the proud families of women who first registered to vote in the United States of America in 1921.

From State



SJR 958 TABOR/“SMARTCAP” A TICKING TIME BOMB

KEY POINTS:

SJR 958 imposes a restrictive, inflexible limit on state revenues.

- It is a constitutional limit on state revenue growth by the combined rate of inflation and population growth.
- The limitation would apply broadly to state taxes, fees, assessments, licenses, fines, and charges for

services. There are a few exemptions, however.

- It provides an incremental reduction of flexibility in the limit with full-implementation of the limit in FY 2019.

SJR 958 doesn't fix the fundamental flaws of TABOR.

- The formula is flawed. Like Colorado's TABOR, SJR 958 limits state revenues to a formula based on growth in overall population and inflation. This formula does not allow a state to maintain year after year the same level of programs and services it now provides.
- The formula's components do not accurately measure the change in the cost of providing public services, and in fact, no existing measure correctly captures the growth in the costs of these services.

Even in times of emergency, the ability to suspend or override the rigid limits is almost impossible.

- The law locks the rigid limits into the state's constitution. It would take a legislative supermajority to override SJR 958.
- This difficult process empowers a minority, which can become obstructionist and demand unrelated favors in return for votes.
- When Florida suffers hurricanes, flooding, oil spills, or other emergencies, government must be ready to step in to help people get through tough times. Beyond the use of reserves and the state hurricane trust fund, SJR 958 would make handling emergencies more difficult than it otherwise would be. This measure forces a complicated, politically-driven response.

The measure would undermine Florida's ability to make long-term investments in areas that are key to economic prosperity.

- Over time SJR 958 would begin to produce annual budget cuts that would grow each year – like the Colorado TABOR.
- SJR 958 could result in lower bond ratings and higher borrowing costs for Florida. In Colorado, bond rating agencies downgraded the state because of features in the overly restrictive formula.
- Because future payments to bondholders would be subject to the TABOR limit, investors would be more hesitant to invest in Florida bonds, driving up the interest payments that Florida would have to pay, at a potential annual cost to the state of tens of millions of dollars.

cont'd SJR958 p. 6

SJR958 *cont'd*

- This could result in a decline in infrastructure investments in projects like school construction, transportation improvements, environmental system remediation, and community development projects. This means jobs and our state's ability to grow.

Florida's families, communities, and businesses can't afford SJR 958.

- Already, Florida lags behind the rest of the country on key measures of funding adequacy for public services, such as affordable higher education, health care coverage for low-income seniors and children, and K-12 class size. Over time, SJR 958 would lead to increasingly deep cuts in the amount of revenue needed to meet existing and emerging needs.
- Services to the elderly could be maintained only if Florida residents were willing to make sharp cuts in other areas of the state budget, such as education or public safety.

SJR 958 will limit state and local government's ability to make new investments, address federal mandates, and leverage federal dollars.

- The rigidities of formula-based budgeting, such as a population-and-inflation growth factor, do not allow funding of new priorities that may be embraced by the public, as has happened in the past with initiatives to reduce class sizes or put in place more stringent corrections policies.
- It could impede the ability of the state and localities to adapt to federal mandates that require states to spend more in specific areas, such as security and education, or to pull down additional federal dollars for specific priorities.

Even though they are exempted from the limit, local governments will be impacted.

- Local governments typically receive around 40 percent of their general fund revenues through intergovernmental transfers, largely from state government. If the state is forced to reduce spending, local governments may feel the squeeze as well.
- As the state reduces the public services it provides, the pressure on local government to meet the needs of Floridians would increase. With less revenue and more demand for services, local governments would be forced to either raise taxes or cut services.

Colorado is the ONLY state to have a TABOR, and it proved to be so damaging it was suspended.

- Colorado is the only state with a TABOR. In 2005, led by a bipartisan coalition of business, senior, civic, children, and faith-based groups, Colorado voters suspended the law to halt the deluge of harmful budget cuts that had occurred and were slated to occur under TABOR. Under TABOR, Colorado fell in many major indicators of performance:

Education

- By 2000, Colorado had fallen to 50th in K-12 spending, making the state dead last in the percentage of state wealth devoted to public schools.
- The state ranks last in sending disadvantaged kids to college.
- Colorado ranks 49th in state support of higher education.

Health Care

- Colorado spends less than most other states on public health.
- Colorado is at the bottom in rates of prenatal care.
- Colorado has the highest rate of uninsured low-income children in the nation.
- Colorado ranks 49th in spending on Medicaid. Many doctors don't accept patients on Medicaid because the reimbursement rates are so low.

Economic Development

- TABOR failed as an economic development tool for Colorado.
- The state's highways and transportation corridors are in growing disrepair with less than 60% rated good or fair.
- Colorado lost more jobs in the last recession than any but three other states.
- In 2002, the per-capita income in Colorado fell faster than in any other state.
- Colorado unemployment has more than doubled during the last recession; the state lost 18,000 jobs in 2003 alone.
- Despite the time-out, after ten years of TABOR, Colorado's economy and budget was placed in a weakened position as it headed into the current recession. In 2010, business leaders led a coalition to prevent efforts to strengthen TABOR.

cont'd **SJR958** p. 8

Fiscal Stability

Prior to the time-out, TABOR resulted in a downgrade of Colorado's bond rating.

Financial analysts specifically blamed TABOR for making the state's fiscal crisis during the last recession worse.

Prior to the time-out, *Governing Magazine* ranked Colorado's finances as among the worst managed in the country, again due to TABOR.

TABOR is an idea that has been considered and rejected in over 20 states, including Florida.

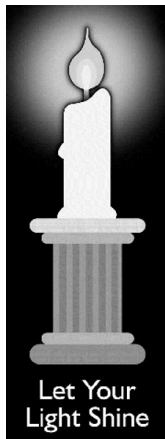
Since Colorado adopted TABOR in 1992, over 20 state legislatures have rejected TABOR, and it has been voted down in every state in which it reached the ballot. This has happened in "Red" and "Blue" states alike.

The Florida Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, after a full and extensive consideration in 2008, determined that it was not in the best interest of state residents to adopt a TABOR, and declined to place it on the ballot.

In past years, Florida and other states have rejected TABOR because it does more than control state spending, as its proponents often claim. It requires massive reductions in vital services that residents want and need — education, health care, public safety, roads, environmental protection, and others.

Adopting the proposed revenue cap, which would restrict the amount of money available to fund these key programs at both the state and local level, would be devastating to Florida. It would hurt not only Florida's children and adults, but also the economy, which relies on educated individuals and up-to-date infrastructure in order to grow.

SJR958 is currently in Messages in the House.



From National



One year ago this week the Affordable Care Act became law! And, some provisions of the law are already in effect. Current beneficiaries of this historic Act are children with pre-existing conditions, young adults to age 26 who can now stay on their parents' health plans and those of us whose coverage had lifetime limits.

Government reactions to the new law have been positive and negative. We laud those states that have started important groundwork for implementing provisions of the complex Act. As for those states working to overturn the law through court action and members of Congress working to repeal it, our fight continues. Going backwards is not an option, and the anticipated financial and human cost of such a move is indeed great.

Throughout the debate, the League has stayed the course for reform of the American health care system, from original support for the Affordable Care Act to beating back current repeal efforts. During this anniversary week, let's remember the importance of this historic Act and the part we have played. And, most importantly, let's commit to continue our vital work, not only to preserve what we have accomplished, but to ensure true health care reform and coverage for all.

PUBLIC EDUCATION STUDY

The LWVUS study on the "Role of the Federal Government in Public Education" is well underway. The target schedule is for Leagues to have materials (papers, consensus questions and a Leaders Guide for taking consensus) in May. Local Leagues will have from May through November to conduct their local study and take consensus. The study committee is writing papers; as they are completed, they will be posted on the LWVUS website. In addition, a webinar is scheduled for April 21. Watch the Leaders' Update and the Public Education List for the availability of the study materials. What can you do right now? Form a study committee, select a chair and put the study on your local League calendars. Also, keep reading the Public Education list.

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