



Hello, Everyone,

A lot is going on in Tallahassee - Women's rights are on the firing line as are the rights of the elderly and others who rely on Medicaid assistance; and we are seeing the effects of Citizens United vs. the FEC first hand here in Florida with politicians able to raise untold amounts of money through special interests. Below is a recap of what happened last week - the League is working for you - please encourage individuals to join the League. We need their voices now more than ever!!

There was action this week on one of the League's top priorities; the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR). With the Senate Bill 958 still residing in House messages, the House Finance and Tax Committee held a workshop to begin discussion of its version of TABOR. TABOR would place a formula to limit revenue growth in Florida in the state Constitution. The formula is based on the rate of inflation and population growth.

During the House committee workshop, the Chair, Representative Steve Precourt indicated that he wanted the Committee to consider expanding the reach of the Senate Bill to include limits on local government revenue as well as state revenue. Those speaking against TABOR included the AARP and LWVF President Deirdre Macnab. No vote was taken at this workshop, but it will likely be voted on next week when the committee meets again. The League is urging its members to **contact their state Representative now** regarding this legislation. **Please visit** <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/representatives.aspx> to find your Representative and urge him / her to vote NO on Senate Joint Resolution 958!

The first major bill to be passed by the legislature this year, Senate Bill 736, was signed into law by Governor Rick Scott. It's a revised version of last year's Senate Bill 6 dealing with teacher tenure and merit pay. The bill eliminates tenure for public school teachers and requires that 50% of a teacher's evaluation be based on student progress on tests including the FCAT. It also creates a system of merit pay for teachers who do well on their evaluations. Critics complain that the bill does not provide funding for the merit pay raises.

Another issue of concern to the League became law this week without the Governor's signature. Last year, former Governor Crist vetoed a bill allowing legislative leaders to create new campaign finance accounts within the political parties where they could raise unlimited contributions year-round; even during the legislative session. These so-called "leadership funds" are currently banned in the state, but legislators have been using the political parties to get around the ban. On Thursday, both houses of the legislature voted to override Crist's veto and Florida's legislative leaders now have new and extremely powerful avenues to raise special interest campaign money.

Separate versions of Medicaid reform legislation continue to make their way through both the House and Senate. In the House, a rewrite of the state's \$22 billion Medicaid program cleared the Budget committee, but not before Republican members added a provision making it **tougher for patients to sue doctors**. Medicaid patients who are injured due to medical malpractice would be limited to a \$300,000 award under



the amendment. In the Senate, similar legislation (SB 1972) is moving through the committee process. The House and Senate bills differ in the details, but both would move the majority of the state's 2.9 million Medicaid clients to HMO-style plans.

House legislation to reform how the state manages growth now has a bill number. House Bill 7129 called "The Community Planning Act" would essentially "gut" state growth management requirements for cities and counties. It would undercut the rights of citizens to appeal inappropriate local government planning decisions, **weaken the ability of local governments to charge developers for the costs of new roads and schools, allow large-scale development without any certainty that conservation lands will be preserved and seriously curtail state review of local plan amendments.** The Senate is expected to develop similar legislation, but for the time being the League is urging its members to **contact their representatives and urge them to vote "No" on House Bill 7129.**

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There are at least 18 bills somewhere in the legislative process addressing women's reproductive rights. Three of the bills made it through a House committee this week. One requires a woman seeking an abortion to have an ultrasound and be asked if she wants to view it, before having the abortion. A similar measure last year was vetoed by former Governor Charlie Crist. Other bills moving through the legislature include one that would limit third trimester abortions and require abortion clinics be owned by physicians. Another would prohibit private insurers from covering abortions if the policy is paid for using any public money. The League is closely monitoring these bills.

Other issues the League is watching closely include clean water issues, reform of the Judiciary, ethics and health care.

And finally, the criminal trial of former House Speaker Ray Sansom abruptly ended on Friday after the state dropped its case. Sansom and his friend and campaign contributor Ray Odom were charged with conspiring to rig a \$6 million airport hanger, purportedly for Northwest Florida State College, when Sansom was the House Budget Chairman. The state dropped the case in return for Sansom and Odom agreeing to pay \$103,000 each to the College for money it spent designing the hanger.

The defense in this case argued that Sansom and Odom were basically conducting business as usual in the state Capitol. Odom was merely lobbying for a special project in Sansom's district. And Sansom was merely bringing home the bacon for his constituents. In dropping the case, **the state seems to be admitting that this kind of legislative corruption is legal and really is "business as usual."**

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