

CAPITOL REPORT

2015 Legislative Session Ends in Limbo



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In a move that shocked veteran Capitol insiders, the House of Representatives abruptly closed its doors and went home days before the end of the 9th and final week of session. The surprising action left the state without a budget, immediately killed a number of bills, and left Senators with the choice of supporting the House version of companion bills or watching them die.

Under usual circumstances, the last week of the legislative session is a blur of negotiating, with bills bouncing back and forth between the Chambers in hopes of reaching agreement before the final moments of session. But with the House adjourning Tuesday, the 2015 session has ended with no budget, no health care, and dozens of bills dead for this year. We expect lawmakers will return to the Capitol in June for a special session to negotiate and pass a budget. Meanwhile, here is where our priority issues ended up.

THE 2015 LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

THE GOOD

ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION:

The establishment of a system of online voter registration to provide ease of access, increased accountability, and significant cost savings was one of the LWVF's top priority issues. Thanks to the hard work of Senator Jeff Clemens, the

unanimous support of all 67 Supervisors of Elections throughout the state, and the voices of our members, this bipartisan bill was overwhelmingly passed in both chambers of the Legislature. Despite late and sudden protest by Rick Scott's Secretary of State appointee Ken Detzner, the Senate approved OVR by a vote of 37-3, while the House passed OVR by a vote of 109-9. **PASSED** and sent to the Governor for signing. Stay tuned, we may need your voices soon.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION REFORM:

Legislation that would make a series of changes to the Florida Public Service Commission, including limiting Commissioners to three consecutive terms, requiring annual ethics training and trying to protect utility customers from rate increases based on changes in billing cycles. The League believes that this is the first step towards leveling the playing field with regards to renewable energy development. **PASSED** and sent to the Governor for signing.

GUN SAFETY:

Efforts to allow concealed carry on all college and university campuses across Florida were defeated in the Senate. This bill was considered a top priority for the gun lobby. This dangerous legislation was universally opposed by all Presidents of the Florida public university system, as well as their respective law enforcement agencies. It died in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The League was active in speaking against the bill in committee meetings, and reached out to politically active students at Florida State University, which even led to the resurgence of the FSU League. Congratulations to those young men and women!

ALIMONY:

A bill that would have eliminated permanent alimony and provide a 50-50 child sharing arrangement died when the House adjourned for the session.

THE BAD

ABORTION RESTRICTIONS:

The Florida Legislature passed a bill that requires a 24-hour waiting period for a woman seeking to terminate a pregnancy. The bill allows for exceptions in the case of rape, incest or domestic violence, but only with documentation. **PASSED** and sent to the Governor for signing.

SPRINGS PROTECTION:

Efforts by Senator Simmons, Senator Dean, and the Senate Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee (SB 918) to provide protections to Florida's first magnitude Springs has died waiting at the House door. This year's legislation, which included the development of a system of walking and biking trails, was expanded to include the damaging Water Policy bill (HB 7003) passed by the House on the third day of session. Those provisions weakened water quality requirements and place too much reliance on best management practices. We

applaud the Senators' commitment to protecting Florida's springs and trails, but look forward to working toward a comprehensive approach to water resource protection in the coming months.

AMENDMENT 1 FUNDING:

The budget impasse has left the Land and Water Conservation Fund allocation undetermined at this juncture. In reviewing the proposed distributions proposed by the House, Senate and Governor, the League has found the funding level for the premier land acquisition program, Florida Forever, is wholly underfunded in each of the proposals. The Amendment 1 campaign secured 75% support from voters, a campaign in which the League secured the second highest number of petition signatures of any organization in Florida! We will continue to advocate for sound land and water conservation uses for your Amendment 1 dollars!

THE UGLY:

The House ending session three days early without a budget resolved resulted in several things. It resulted in a failure to protect Floridians by providing health care insurance to our working poor. It resulted in a failure to consider a plan to accept \$51 billion in federal funds for Medicaid expansion. It resulted in a failure to protect Florida's safety net hospitals by leaving them to somehow offset the costs of treating 800,000 uninsured Floridians. It resulted in a failure to protect Florida's businesses, who will shoulder the costs of treating uninsured patients, along with the taxpayers.



Speaking about the Florida Senate attempting to fund Low Income Pool Program, House Appropriations Chairman Richard Corcoran stated, "They want us to come dance. We are not dancing. We are not dancing this session, we are not dancing next session, we are not dancing next summer. We're not dancing."

Get Involved!

Debbie Harrison Rumberger is the League's professional lobbyist for the 2015 Legislative Session. Aply supported by our very active volunteer Lobby Corps, and our Legislative Interns Cathy Barrios and Abdelilah Skhir. Updates on League

legislative issues will be provided on a regular basis through Capitol Report, which is published every week during the session. Important information may also be accessed at www.leg.state.fl.us. Watch for your Capitol Report each Friday of the session for news on priority issues and what you can do to help. For updates on or copies of proposed legislation, call legislative information at 1-800-342-1827 or visit the Florida Online Sunshine homepage at www.leg.state.fl.us. For more information about the League's advocacy, check out www.thefloridavoter.com

Thank you,

Debbie Harrison Rumberger
LWVF Legislative Liaison