



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF FLORIDA

CAPITOL REPORT

2015 SPECIAL SESSION: EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTING



Capitol Report 2015

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Filed by: Debbie Harrison Rumberger, LWVF Governmental Consultant

VOTERS are the biggest losers in the outcome of the Florida Legislative Special Session. The high-drama session ended Friday night with the adoption of the 2015-2016 budget and the traditional dropping of the hankie.

You will recall the regular session ended on a high note for the LWVF, with the adoption of Online Voter Registration, sponsored by Senator Jeff Clemens (D-Lake Worth). A bill allowing the carrying of concealed weapons on college and university campuses had died in the Senate after being passed by the House. And baby steps were taken to level the playing field for renewable energy initiatives by creating term limits, ethics training, and lobbyist registration for the Public Service Commission, which determines utility policy in the state.

The Special Session became necessary when the House of Representatives, led by Speaker Steve Crisafulli, prematurely ended the regular session in a dispute over acceptance of federal healthcare dollars. The Supreme Court has determined that the actions of the House of Representatives violated the state Constitution. A rare Special Session was called to adopt a

budget for the state, the one constitutionally-mandated responsibility of the Legislature.

AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL FLORIDIANS: DIES IN HOUSE, AGAIN

The Senate worked tirelessly to advance a proposal to bring \$51 billion in federal health care funding to provide health coverage to over 800,000 of Florida's working poor. In a standoff that captured the attention of the nation, Senate President Andy Gardiner and his members prepared and adopted a health coverage program (FHIX) that would allow Florida to access those federal dollars, with no response whatsoever from the House. The failure to accept those dollars has resulted in the Legislature cutting Floridians' anticipated budget surplus dramatically. Close to a million of our fellow citizens continue to live without basic health coverage, and \$51 billion of Florida's tax dollars will not be brought back to our state.

Please click on the link below to grasp the frustration of Senate Appropriations members:

https://www.flsenate.gov/media/videoplayer?EventID=2443575804_2015061017

BUDGET SURPLUS SLASHED:

The \$1 billion budget surplus promised by Governor Scott in his re-election campaign was reduced to less than half as a result of the rejection of Florida's federal health care funds. The Governor signed HB 33A into law, providing Floridians with a tax cut of just \$372 million. The wide-ranging tax cut package that will reduce costs on cell phone bills, cable TV bills, gun club memberships, college textbooks and luxury boat repairs.

The signing came a day after the measure was overwhelmingly approved by the House and Senate. For many Floridians, the biggest checkbook item may be a \$20.00 per year reduction in the communications-services tax on cell-phone and cable-TV bills.

AMENDMENT 1: ANOTHER LOTTERY SCAM?

Backers of a ballot initiative known as Amendment 1, including the LWVF, contend lawmakers "ignored" the desires of voters by using a boost in environmental funding to cover the costs of daily state operations while setting aside too little for land buying.

The concept of the constitutional amendment was spawned as funding diminished for the Florida Forever program, which uses bonds backed with revenue from documentary-stamp real estate taxes and authorizes lawmakers to spend up to \$300 million a year for preservation. Frustration with low allocations over the previous few years drove voters to demand higher funding levels through the Amendment 1 ballot initiative which secured 75% approval from the electorate. The ballot initiative, approved in November, requires for the next 20 years that 33 percent of the proceeds from documentary-stamp taxes go for land and water protections across Florida.

For the upcoming year, funding under Amendment 1 for such land and water programs will grow to more than \$740 million, from around \$470 million in the current budget year that ends June 30. And yet, even with this significant influx of Amendment 1 dollars, environmental funding in the upcoming budget has been reduced from last years' level.

LWVF Vice-President and Natural Resources Chair Chuck O'Neal said, "The Legislature has

defied the voters and the Constitution of the state of Florida. Allocating \$17.4 million for Florida Forever out of \$750 million available isn't consistent with Amendment 1 and flies in the face of the voters of Florida." O'Neal continued, "Nor is assigning funds intended for new environmental purchases to cover existing staff and operations currently funded out of General Revenue. It's feeling like the Lottery all over again".

TO REVIEW THE SPECIAL SESSION ACTION, PLEASE [CLICK HERE](#)

STAY INVOLVED

Less than 90 days from now, 2016 Legislative Committee Weeks will begin. Our job is not over. In a democratic society, the work of voters never ends. But with your continued strength and involvement, we will continue our demand for voter rights, voter participation, and carrying the voice of the voters to our elected Legislators. We will be here. We know you will be, too.

Thank you,
Debbie Harrison Rumberger
LWVF Legislative Liaison

League of Women Voters of Florida | 540 Beverly Court | Tallahassee | FL | 32301-4559