



Volume I      Number VIII

## SAVE THE DATE!

The next regular meeting of the *SOUTH SHORE DEMOCRATIC CLUB* will be held at **1:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 12 at the South Shore Regional Library 15816 Beth Shields Way in Ruskin.** Refreshments will be available at 1:00 p.m.

Our featured speaker for this meeting is Dr. Jason W. Wilson M.D., Attending Physician and Associate Research Director, University of South Florida, Emergency Room Residency Program, Tampa General Hospital. He will speak about the Affordable Health Care Act, which Republicans derisively refer to as "ObamaCare".

## OBAMA APPROVAL RISING

Progressives have been waiting for a long time to see President Obama take a tougher line with Republican bomb-throwers and their irresponsible brinkmanship, especially on economic matters. That's exactly what the President did on the Senate compromise to extend the payroll tax cut, and this time the bullies in the House Republican caucus backed down.

Now, a new Gallop Poll, released Tuesday, reveals that President Obama's job approval rating climbed steadily during December as he fought Republicans on the issue and is now above his disapproval rating for the first time since July.

The rating for Obama climbed to 47 percent versus a 45 percent measure of disapproval, according to Gallup's three-day rolling average of polls, taken between December 21 and December 23. This was up from approval of 41 percent and disapproval of 51 percent early in the month. The gain in the Gallup poll echoed other surveys showing his approval ratings on the mend, as public opinion sided with Obama during the bitter dispute to extend a tax cut to around 160 million Americans, worth some \$40 per bi-weekly paycheck.

## AMENDMENT 7 BACK ON THE BALLOT

A measure doing away with a century-old prohibition on using state funds for religious purposes is back on the November 2012 ballot after Attorney General **Pam Bondi** rewrote the proposal using a Tallahassee judge's guidance. Under a new election law signed by Gov. **Rick Scott** this spring, Bondi

had 10 days to rewrite the ballot summary.

The amendment makes it easier for the GOP-dominated legislature and executive branch to steer taxpayer money to religious entities, including schools. The amendment seeks to change Florida's constitution to ensure that "*no individual or entity may be denied, on the basis of religious identity or belief, governmental benefits, funding, or other support.*" At least 60 percent of voters must approve the measure for it to pass.

The plaintiffs in the case, including religious leaders and the Florida Education Association, also tried but failed to get Lewis to strike down a new law that allows the attorney general instead of the legislature (which originated the amendment) to revise the summary if a court strikes it down as misleading. Bondi's rewrite Tuesday is the first time the new law giving her that ability has been used.

There is no word yet on whether the plaintiffs intend to appeal the original ruling which rejected many of their original arguments against placing the proposition on the ballot.

## **"AWAKE THE STATE" ON JANUARY 10**

*"Awake the State"* will hold protests targeting Gov. Rick Scott and the GOP-led Legislature throughout the state on the first day of Florida's legislative session, **Jan. 10**.

*Progress Florida's* Mark Ferrulo explained that the focus of *Awake the State* will now shift to the legislative session and the campaigns people can put together to address "the onslaught of attacks" that have "undermined" the state's middle class. He also said [Governor Scott's economic plans](#) would be a big focus the upcoming year.

The *"Awake the State"* movement began when the progressive groups *Progress Florida, Florida Watch Action and America Votes* joined together to provide a platform for everyday Floridians to make their voices heard. *Awake the State* started as a Facebook page that quickly grew to thousands strong who organized rallies in cities all across the state of Florida on the opening day of last year's legislative session.

"If you've had enough of Gov. Scott and the Legislature's extreme attacks on our middle class, our public schools, health care, our land and water, voting rights, and our civil rights, it's time to *Awake The State*," the group's [Website](#) proclaims.

So far, *Awake the State* has announced rallies in Miami, Tallahassee, Sarasota, Pinellas, Broward County, Tampa, Okaloosa, The Villages, Marion, and Lakeland. The Tampa rally is scheduled for 5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. at the Gaslight Park, 4:10 N Franklin St. [Map and directions can be found here.](#)

## **LAWSUIT FILED OVER RESTRICTIVE VOTING LAWS**

*(Sarasota Herald-Tribune Editorial)* "The venerable Florida League of Women Voters has decided to make a federal case out of a restrictive, punitive and politically motivated voting law approved this year by the state Legislature.

*Good for the league, and its co-plaintiffs.*

*The league is one of three groups that filed a lawsuit last week in a Tallahassee federal court, challenging the law. The suit asserts that the state law violates the plaintiffs' rights to free speech and conflicts with the National Voter Registration Act.*

*Joining the league were Rock the Vote — a national organization that engages young Americans in*

voting — and the Florida Public Interest Group Education Fund.

*This lawsuit is one of two federal cases involving the Florida voting law.*

*A three-judge panel for the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., already had the state law under review. Also last week, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder suggested that some of the provisions in Florida's statute are being subjected to intensified scrutiny in connection with the court's review.*

*Let's hope the federal cases ensure the in-depth analysis of the Florida law's impacts — on First Amendment rights and the national act — that the Legislature failed to provide. The state law codified bad public policies; the two federal cases will determine whether the statute violates constitutional principles or national law.*

*One of the most egregious provisions directly impacts the League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan organization with a long record of properly registering people, and other so-called third-party groups.*

*In the past, third-party groups had 10 days to submit voter-registration forms to elections supervisors. That deadline provided organizations — especially those, like the league, highly dependent on volunteers — with reasonable time to comply with the law. But the Legislature dramatically reduced the time for compliance — to two days — and provided for punitive fines.*

*"Sadly, Florida's anti-voter law creates impassable roadblocks for our volunteers, who are simply trying to bring fellow citizens into our democratic process," said Deirdre Macnab, president of the Florida League of Women Voters.*

*Registration must be regulated and monitored, but the law's roadblocks are excessive and unnecessary. If courts don't remove those barriers, the Legislature should.*

*Another flagrant abuse of legislative power is the Florida law's explicit prohibition of early voting on the Sunday before Election Day. Reasonable political arguments can be made for and against the Legislature's reduction of the early-voting period to eight days from 14 days. But the Republican-controlled Legislature's ban on Sunday balloting was clearly aimed — based on voter participation in the 2008 presidential election — at diminishing participation by Florida's black voters, who generally support Democratic candidates.*

*All voters should be concerned*

*Regardless of partisan affiliation, or lack thereof, Floridians should be worried about the voting law. A total of four provisions, including the third-party group restrictions and the downsizing of the early-voting period, are subjects of the Washington court's review, which will not be completed before the state Jan. 31 presidential primary, complicating this key contest for Republicans.*

*Just as important as the legal issues and technicalities is the underlying sentiment of the law. Ensuring the integrity of registration and voting is vital. The Legislature could have tweaked the law to provide additional protections against fraud without imposing excessive restrictions on voter-registration drives and early-voting schedules that clearly improved citizen participation.*

*Unfortunately, the Legislature opted for regulations and restrictions that deter participation in democracy.*

*If that's not against the law, it should be."*

## **BONDI COMES UP SHORT**

Orlando Sentinel columnist Scott Maxwell pulled no punches last week in describing the shameful

inaction of Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi on the widespread foreclosure fraud problems in the state.

The five states that have been hit the hardest by foreclosures and foreclosure fraud are Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, and Nevada. In four of the five, says Maxwell, the states' Attorneys General have used everything from Lawsuits to criminal subpoenas to go after the fraudsters trying to evict families from their homes. The fifth? Florida, where the only action Bondi has taken on the issue is to fire the two investigators who were working to expose and prosecute the biggest practitioners of foreclosure fraud in the state. He also points out that earlier this year one of Bondi's top advisors left to work for a firm her office was investigating!

**"Something stinks. I've said so for months,"** wrote Maxwell in a December 20 column.

Bondi argues her office did nothing wrong by ousting 'insolent' employees. She claims she's as vigilante as ever. Her office repeatedly notes that she has assigned even more staffers to the fraud unit. "So what," Maxwell continued. "More staff doesn't mean squat. Where are the results?"

Maxwell says that he asked Bondi's office for examples of any major settlements or prosecutions since the office ousted its top two investigators. All he's received so far "was a statement from her office in support of Hanukah."

The columnist also recalled a "disturbing conversation" he had with Richard Lawson, the head of Bondi's economic crimes division earlier this year. "During the talk, Lawson downplayed any expectations of prosecution and big settlements, saying he'd rather **work with the firms** to change the culture," according to Maxwell, who also emphasized the irony that exists when homeowners don't play by the rules and get evicted, while banks that don't behave legally get a second chance.

"Hogwash," says Maxwell. (Ed. That's one way of putting it!)

## **KEYSTONE PIPELINE WILL NOT CREATE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF JOBS**

The Keystone Oil Pipeline, the subject of much Republican attention as a bargaining chip in the recent fight over extending the payroll tax cut is a system designed to transport crude oil from the Athabasca Oil Sands in northeastern Canada all the way to refineries along the Gulf Coast of Texas, an oilman's dream and environmentalist's nightmare. President Obama had postponed a decision on the pipeline until 2013 claiming it needed more study. Republicans, however, demanded that the President approve the project immediately before they would vote on the tax cut extension. Their argument was that the construction of the pipeline would produce "tens of thousands of jobs" (according to *TransCanada*, the company behind the project).

However, studies conducted independently of TransCanada find much smaller jobs numbers, far from "tens of thousands." An oil contractor hired by the State Department reported it would create between 5,000 and 6,000 temporary jobs, while an independent study by Cornell University found it would create only 500 to 1,400 temporary jobs. Once the costs of the increased pollution and risk of oil spills is factored in, Cornell found, **the jobs impact is likely to be negative.**

The compromise, fashioned by the White House and Senate Republicans that was initially rejected by House Teapublicans then finally approved, requires the Administration to OK the pipeline within 60 days *"unless the President declares publicly that it is not in the national interest."*

## THANK YOU!

As we wrap up this, our last edition of VIEWPOINT for 2011, we take a moment to thank you, our readers, for the gracious comments you have made about our newsletter as well as the suggestions some of you have made to improve it. As always, we welcome your comments.



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