



E c o n o m i c D e v e l o p m e n t

Economics 101

by Curt Leonard

If you drive north across the Florida border you'll experience a phenomenon that should make any Florida policy-maker wince.

To the left and to the right, through Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, even west into Alabama or northwest into Tennessee, there are huge buildings. Inside these huge buildings things are being made. This is called "manufacturing."

Around the huge buildings are vast parking lots. In Florida parking lots of this size are reserved for football fans, while in our neighbors to the north the enormous stretches of macadam are reserved for the hundreds and even thousands of employees who work in the huge buildings and actually make the things for the employer. The employer pays these employees money for their services. Their services are called "manufacturing jobs."

The employees take the money and they spend it on other things; houses, cars, food, household items, and an endless list of necessities and non-essentials, and of course, taxes.

Florida's legislators should wince because there are far too few of these jobs in Florida and the deficit is not getting any better. And that's because Florida's tax policy (if such an animal actually exists) strongly suggests to those companies that their manufacturing jobs are simply not wanted here.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, an already wobbly Florida economy went into a genuine slump. Heavily depen-

dent upon tourism, our state's economy sagged as travel nationwide came to a virtual standstill and then ever so slowly revived.

During a special session last fall legislators had to adjust the state's books to accommodate the sudden drop in tax revenues. Legislators in both parties opined that Florida was too dependent on tourism and agriculture for its tax dollars. Florida, they suggested, needed a broader tax base and, by extension, a more diversified economy to absorb the inevitable slumps in tourism.

These same legislators changed course in the 2002 legislative session, pursuing the most aggressive, anti-business tax-policy initiative in 15 years via a proposed constitutional amendment that would have given a mere 12 legislators the power to increase state sales taxes. Legislators in other southern states were grateful for this inept and oafish grab for additional tax dollars, and they welcomed even more business relocations to their respective states.

The First District Court of Appeal saved the Florida legislature from itself by striking the amendment from the ballot. Even without the specter of this ill-gotten tax commission, Florida's current tax law is dissolute and in urgent need of reform.

According to the prevailing conventional wisdom, Florida's constitutional ban on a personal income tax and a statewide ad valorem tax on personal property impels the broadening of the current tax base by eliminating certain sales-tax exemptions that now exist. Frequently cited as ripe for elimination are the infamous exemptions for ostrich feed and skybox tickets. These and other seeming inanities of current law are used to make the argument that "special interests" should be pushed back from the

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Choose Well

by Jon L. Shebel, *Publisher*

All the promises to make prescription drugs cheaper, schools better, and summers cooler teach us only one thing about candidates: What they would do if they had absolute authority. Rarely, however, do we hear politicians shape their vows in the context of the very real limits of political power or the true nature of the job we hire them to do.

In our form of government, politicians are decision-makers. We choose them based on their integrity, intelligence, clarity of mind, and wisdom. We select presidents, senators, representatives, attorneys general, mayors, supervisors of elections, school-board members not for what they say they will accomplish, but for how we think they will face the unseen challenges.

Or so we would in a perfect world, or in a nation less dynamic and expansive than ours.

A candidate who answered a question, "I don't know," would be a jewel beyond price but he would probably lose his election. We American voters prefer our candidates likeable, confident, and bursting with plans. Not since the earliest days of our Republic have our elections been openly and candidly about choosing the kind of government we want.

Nevertheless, whether we touch a screen, mark a ballot, or (heaven forbid) punch a chad, our decisions have little to do with whether we'll get better roads or more environmental protection. The devil in the details of all the campaign promises is the governing philosophy espoused by the different candidates.

Over the last 60 years or so, our election decisions seem to be moving us inexorably toward the bitter end foreseen by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*.

Our founding fathers shaped our republican form of government as a shield against the brutal tyrannies of their European pasts. Tocqueville recognized a greater threat looming over America and warned against the lullabye of a gently intrustive welfare state.

"[T]he sovereign," Tocqueville wrote, "extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules ... It does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them; it rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one's acting ... it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd."

Overactive bureaucrats, hyperthyroidal judges and lawyers, nannyish experts tell us that the electorate can't be bothered with filling out a ballot correctly. Parents can't choose which schools are best for their children. Adults can't decide that they will only patronize non-smoking establishments. Bosses and workers can't negotiate reasonable and mutually acceptable employment conditions.

When you get to your polling place, just remember: You're not just voting on promises or personalities. You're voting on whether or not you believe that we can live freely and make our own choices without the help of the meddling hands of government. ■

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trough and made to pay their “fair share.”

While this argument fits well into 15-second sound bites and invariably wins the approval of newspaper editorial board writers, the rigors of implementing tax policy demands a much more sophisticated approach. If the Legislature eliminated every single sales-tax exemption for “business” it would provide a mere \$1.88 billion in additional sales-tax dollars. The state’s current budget is about \$50 billion and that \$1.88 billion figure could be swallowed up in additional Medicaid spending alone in the next two fiscal years.

Small as that number is, however, it is a chimera. Eliminating all \$1.88 billion in business exemptions would most probably cause a catastrophic *drop* in sales tax revenues. Florida businesses would close down, relocate where possible, and generally see their activity decline under the burdens of this additional taxation. Those who would suffer are the customers, suppliers, and employees left behind. The taxes would suffocate economic activity and revenues would actually drop, not rise.

Even as politicians chirp about the global economy, they don’t really seem to understand it. A global economy means that businesses, particularly manufacturers, compete against other companies across the world. Supply and demand — and thus prices — are established worldwide. If the prices of Florida’s products are artificially inflated by state tax and regulatory policies, buyers can easily move to another supplier in a state with a more economically astute government.

“Sticking it” to big business by eliminating \$1.88 billion in sales-tax exemptions confuses crass populism with good politics and, in the end, is a self-defeating course of action. Politicians might receive praise from an adoring press for such a move but it would also earn them a failing grade in Economics 101 at the School of Hard Knocks.

What can Florida do to diversify its economy beyond the low-wage and volatile tourism industry? The easiest step would be actually to broaden the list of sales-tax ex-



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emptions under current law to include “manufacturing inputs,” which are those products, machinery, services, etc., that a company buys to make things like the much-needed widget.

Florida currently taxes manufacturing inputs while other states don’t. All those manufacturing plants and jobs in the states to the north of Florida are there and not here because it’s more expensive to make things and sell them here than it is there.

If Florida pivoted and wisely exempted all manufacturing inputs from taxation, real companies with real jobs would come here in droves. There would be huge buildings with vast parking lots filled with cars driven by employees who own houses and buy things that are already taxed. Sales-tax revenue would go up.

That’s Economics 101. ■

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Skipping the Middle Part

by Doug S. Bailey

Without the Posey amendment, 23 of the state's 76 legislative and statewide elections would have forced a second primary.

Although most of the attention from the September 10 primary has been focused on the failure of the reform effort to prevent a replay of the debacle of 2000, the most dramatic change to the state's election law — the one that will have the greatest impact on the 2002 elections — has been overlooked.

The Florida Election Reform Act of 2001 was a monumental act of lawmaking that encompassed outdated voting systems, provisional ballots, certification deadlines, recount procedures, military and overseas voting, absentee ballots, poll-worker training, voter education, canvassing guidelines, and even the commissioning of a time-zone study.

Lost in the shuffle was an eleventh hour amendment sponsored by Sen. Bill Posey (R-Rockledge) that eliminated the state's second primary elections. The change meant that if the top vote-getter received less than 50 percent of the vote in the primary he would be declared the winner, instead of facing the second-place finisher in a runoff.

Florida's runoffs used to take place five weeks before the general election. According to Fred Galey, Brevard County's supervisor of elections, a challenge under the new law to second-primary results in a large county with optical-scan voting systems would leave the county with an inadequate amount of time for printing and mailing absentee ballots for the general election. "What you end up with," he explained, "is an absentee ballot listing a candidate who may have already lost, thus confusing the overseas and absentee voting process." County elections officials estimated that the Posey amendment would save them up to \$12 million.

Senate Republicans favored the Posey amendment, while House Republicans, including Speaker-elect Johnnie Byrd (R-Plant City) opposed it. Democrats from both houses worried that a single primary system might



hurt their chances in the 2002 gubernatorial election.

A compromise was reached when GOP lawmakers from both houses agreed to suspend the second primary election during the 2002 election season only; thus paving the way for the reinstatement of the runoff elections in 2004. Florida Democrats cried foul, insisting that the temporary elimination

was aimed directly at the 2002 governor's race. Nevertheless, the Florida Election Reform Act of 2001, with Posey's amendment attached, passed easily through both houses with only one negative vote.

With the certification of September 10th's primary results behind us, it's time to measure whether either party benefited from the elimination of the two-primary system.

Without the Posey amendment, 23 of the state's 76 legislative and statewide elections would have forced a second primary. Eleven Republican House races and two Republican Senate races would have ended in runoffs; for the Democrats, one congressional race, one state Senate race, and five House races would have gone to a second round. But without a doubt, this season's single primary process had the greatest effect on the statewide races.

Under the old rules, October would have brought a runoff for agriculture commissioner between wealthy Everglades activist Mary Barley, who received 35.2 percent of the vote, and political neophyte David Nelson, who edged her out with 44.6 percent. A large portion of Nelson's success in the primary can be attributed to an aggressive negative campaign waged against Barley by the state's farmers.

In a second primary, Barley's superior financial resources would have taxed the Nelson campaign and his backers in the agricultural community. With Barley and her money sidelined, however, incumbent Commissioner Charles Bronson looks to cruise through the November election and the ag. guys can focus their financial resources on the governor's race or on November's ballot initiatives.

Score one for the Republicans.

The Democratic nomination for attorney general is another outcome dictated by the single-primary system. The insurgence of Tallahassee Mayor Scott Maddox was certainly an unpleasant surprise to Sen. Buddy Dyer (D-Orlando) who managed to capture only 37.3 percent of the vote to Maddox's 34.9 percent, a difference of less than 28,000 votes. A runoff election that freed up nearly 28 percent of the Democratic base may well have favored Maddox.

Historically, second-primary election turnout is dismal, averaging less than 14 percent over the last ten years. Maddox dominated Duval, Broward, and Leon counties, which all have high voter-turnout rates for second primaries. Whether that advantage would have been enough for Maddox to overcome the 2.3 percent losing margin in the first primary is unclear. Nevertheless Dyer would have had his hands full with Maddox for another five weeks. With popular Republican Charlie Crist and his deep pockets on the horizon, the Democrats needed to get past the nomination phase quickly and with a minimum amount of self-inflicted damage.

Score this one for the Democrats.

This is year's marquee attraction is, of course, the gubernatorial race. Democratic leaders had argued that a single primary system would dilute the primary votes across a crowded field of gubernatorial candidates, spelling success for Bush in 2002. Republicans tried to mask their glee after reaching the same conclusion.

In a crowded primary, Reno held the advantage because her home turf of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties is home to nearly a third of the state's Democrats, giving her the largest foundation on which to build a primary victory. Republicans were excited about a potential race against former U. S. Attorney General Janet Reno because of her political baggage. The controversies she dealt with during the Clinton Administration, including the White House fund-raising investigation and the Elian Gonzalez case, would make it tough for her to pick up independent and swing voters.

Whether by design or by chance, however the crowded Democratic gubernatorial primary field had dwindled to three by the beginning of summer, eliminating Reno's advantage and any Republican Party hopes of having a Clinton liberal on the ballot in November. Bill McBride took the nomination with 44.5 percent of the vote. Reno picked up 43.9 percent and Daryl Jones came in third with 11.6 percent.

A second primary election would have forced a runoff between Reno and McBride,

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of the 2002
elections



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The Most Important Election You Might Be Ignoring

by Jacquelyn Horkan, *Editor*

Forget the governor's race. Never mind about those constitutional amendments. The most important election this year may just be the one to choose a successor to Bob Butterworth as Florida's attorney general.

Prior to the September primary, Tom Warner, one of the Republican candidates for attorney general, described the office he was pursuing as "Florida's chief lawyer and the people's champion." The idea of the attorney general as lawyer/activist is a revolution taking place throughout the United States and November's election stands as a watershed moment for Floridians in the struggle.

When Butterworth was elected to the post in 1986, the transformation was in its early stages, marked by an insurrection of Democratic state attorneys general against the Reagan Administration's goals of deregulation and federalism. The state legal officers of the other party opposed President Reagan's effort to check the government's use of the federal antitrust laws to re-engineer the free market into a model preferred by bureaucrats. That insurrection against limited government moved into new territory with the state lawsuits against tobacco companies in the 1990s.

Butterworth is leaving office as the ambitions of attorneys general have exploded into gun, HMO, and lead paint lawsuits. His own contributions to this expansion of power are impressive but limited. Butterworth was a driving force behind the tobacco litigation, an unprecedented foray into the enactment of regulatory and tax policy, a power the constitution reserves for legislators. Nevertheless, he has acted conservatively by avoiding the worst abuses of power by his colleagues in other states.



Florida's next attorney general will face enormous pressure and temptation to use the newly forged powers of his office to further his own political ambitions and to orchestrate his own personal preferences for a reorganization of our state's civic and economic culture.

Already, state attorneys general are plotting lawsuits against pharmaceutical firms to lower prices, against the federal government to act against global warming, and against makers of alcoholic beverages to pay for the costs imposed on society by drinking.

When you go to your precinct on November 5, remember that you will not just be voting for Bob Butterworth's replacement. You will be voting for someone with the power to use the judicial system to set state regulatory and tax policy or to disdain this path set by other state attorneys general. Of the most important qualities to seek in Florida's next attorney general, perhaps self-restraint ranks as the most important. ■

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Constitutional Amendments On the Ballot

by Jacquelyn Horkan, *Editor*

Voters will be asked to approve ten amendments on November 5, up from three in 2000, but down from the 13 stuffed on the ballot in 1998 by the legislature and the Constitution Revision Commission.

This year half of the amendments are appearing courtesy of lawmakers while the other five are ballot initiatives. One other amendment, which would have given a 12-member joint legislative committee authority to raise state sales-taxes, was stricken from the ballot by the First District Court of Appeal.

The most obvious similarity among the 2002 constitutional amendments is wordiness. The most verbose is Amendment No. 1, which both arose from and created controversy. It is designed by the Florida legislature to shield the state's death penalty against a certain class of constitutional challenges. The amendment was approved by 77 percent of the voters in 1998 but was struck down after the Florida Supreme Court found the ballot summary misleading.

The legislature responded by putting the same amendment back before voters but this time with a 540-word summary, more than three times as long as the language that would actually be inserted into the constitution. State supervisors of elections filed a challenge to the amendment, arguing that the length of the summary would discourage some voters from continuing to the end of the ballot. The court ruled against the elections officials, giving Amendment No 1 another chance at immortality in the Florida Constitution.

Some of our fellow citizens are also waxing prolix on this year's ballot. Amendments No. 8 and 9 together, which mandate universal pre-kindergarten and limits on class size, would add 483 words to the 620 that cur-



The most obvious similarity among the 2002 constitutional amendments is wordiness.

rently make up the education portion of the constitution. Amendment No. 6 would contribute another 825 words to the constitution — almost 500 more words than are necessary to describe the duties of the governor — in order to protect Floridians from the dangers of secondhand smoke in the workplace, unless those Floridians work in bars and nightclubs or tobacco shops.

The amendment requires such length because the sponsors do not want to change the constitution so much as they do want to enact a law.

Placed on Ballot by Florida Legislature

Amendment No. 1

Reference: Article I Section 17

Title: Amending Article I, Section 17 of the State Constitution

Florida's constitution currently prohibits punishment that is either cruel or unusual while the U.S. Constitution bans punishment that is both cruel and unusual. Amendment No. 1 adopts the U.S. Constitution's less stringent requirement in an effort to protect the state's death penalty in the event that the electric chair is ruled cruel or unusual punishment.

Amendment No. 2

Reference: Article XI Section 5

Title: Economic Impact Statements for Proposed Constitutional Amendments or Revisions

This amendment requires the legislature to enact a law that would provide for development of economic-impact statements that would be made available to the public prior to a vote on any constitutional amendment by ballot initiative. This law would not cover amendments placed on the ballot by the Legislature, the Constitution Revision Commission, the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, or a constitutional convention.

In the May 2002 special session, lawmakers enacted such a law that would place the economic impact statement on the ballot along with the summary. That law was subsequently struck down by the Florida Supreme Court.

Amendment No. 3

Reference: Article VIII Section 6

Title: Authorizing Amendments to Miami-Dade County Home Rule Charter by Special Law Approved by Referendum

Amendment No. 3 would conform Miami-Dade's unique charter status to that of the state's other 15 charter-county governments by giving lawmakers the power to put amendments to the charter before voters in the county. The amendment is the brainchild of Rep. Carlos LaCasa (R-Miami), who believes that weakening the county

commissioners will benefit residents of Miami-Dade.

Amendment No. 4

Reference: Article I Section 24

Title: Laws Providing Public Records or Meetings Exemptions; Two-Thirds Vote Required

As the title suggests, this amendment would place a higher hurdle on passage of exemptions to public records or meetings laws by requiring a two-thirds vote in both chambers instead of the existing simple majority approval.

Amendment No. 7

Reference: Article VII Section 4

Title: Exemption for Construction of Living Quarters for Parents or Grandparents.

Amendment No. 7 would give county governments the discretion to create a property tax exemption for a homeowner who increases the value of a homestead property by constructing living quarters for a parent or grandparent, 62 years old or older, of the property owner or his spouse. The exemption is limited to the total increase in actual value, up to 20 percent of the total assessed value after improvement.

Placed on Ballot through Initiative

Amendment No. 6

Sponsor: Smoke-Free for Health, Inc.

Reference: Article X Section 20

Title: Protect People from the Health Hazards of Second-Hand Tobacco Smoke by Prohibiting Workplace Smoking.

This 825-word amendment would ban smoking in all enclosed workplaces, except for retail tobacco shops, designated hotel rooms and other lodgings, and stand-alone bars. The amendment requires such length because the sponsors do not want to change the constitution so much as they do want to enact a law. Unlike most constitutional passages, this one includes definitions, exceptions, even a "Whereas" clause, all intended to give lawmakers the least possible amount of discretion.



Amendment 8

Sponsor: Pre-K Committee

Reference: Article IX Section 1

Title: Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten Education

The sponsors of this initiative want state-sponsored, universal pre-kindergarten by the 2005-06 school year. The program would be provided free-of-charge to all four-year olds on a strictly voluntary basis.

State economists say the program would cost between \$425 and \$650 million to implement over the next two years, while others say the cost would be twice as much. Under this constitutional proposal, funding for universal pre-K cannot come at the expense of existing education, health care, or development programs, which make up most of the budget. If this amendment and Amendment No. 9 were both to receive voter approval, together with the high-spend rail mandate enacted two years ago, deep program cuts and tax hikes will become a virtual necessity.

Gov. Bush says he supports universal pre-K, as do most other politicians. Educators say pre-K gives children a boost in education, although some studies indicate that the advantage is short-lived in the absence of positive parental influence and quality elementary instruction. About half of Florida's 187,000 four-year olds do not attending preschool, which is different from daycare.

Amendment No. 9

Sponsor: Coalition to Reduce Class Size

Reference: Article IX Section 1

Title: Florida's Amendment to Reduce Class Size

Under Amendment No. 9, the maximum number of students in a pre-kindergarten to third grade class would be 18 students; the limit in fourth through eighth grades would be 22, while high school classes could not exceed 25 students. The amendment would also make a constitutional declaration that class size is part of a high-quality education, a statement that science does not precisely support.

Beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, lawmakers would have to provide enough money to reduce the average number of students per classroom by at least two students per year until it meets the limits set forth in the amendment, a task that must be completed by 2010.

State economists calculated a \$27.5 billion dollar price tag between now and 2010, an amount that the amendment's proponents say is twice as high as it should be. The Department of Education estimated the cost at \$13 billion over eight years while the governor's office says \$40 billion in new funding will be required. Florida's Postsecondary Education Planning Commission fired up its calculator and arrived at \$29 billion in total implementation costs.

Whatever the final figure will be, experience shows that implementing this mandate will be difficult and will bring a number of unintended consequences. In the 2000 session, for example, the legislature enacted a law, effective in 2003, that limited school (not classroom) sizes. Administrators in urban counties, where the need is greatest, have run into a number of obstacles, including a lack of acceptable property available for purchase.

As Florida struggles to build more than 30,000 classrooms and hire 30,000 teachers by the end of the decade, no doubt school officials and lawmakers will find themselves forced into cutting corners, by eliminating spending on extracurricular activities, freezing teacher pay, hiring less expensive — and less qualified — teachers.

Whatever the final figure will be, experience shows that implementing this mandate will be difficult and will bring a number of unintended consequences.

Florida's lack of pig farmers, which translates to a lack of opposition, as well as the ease of amending our state's constitution is the apparent inspiration for this attack on our constitution.

Amendment No. 10

Sponsor: Floridians for Humane Farms

Reference: Article X Section 19

Title: Animal Cruelty Amendment: Limiting Cruel and Inhumane Confinement of Pigs During Pregnancy

Come November 6, Florida might just become the first state in the union to grant constitutional protection to animals. Well, not all animals. Just pigs. Or rather just the pregnant ones.

Amendment No. 10 would make it a violation of the state's constitution to keep the porcine mommas-to-be from moving about freely. At 475 words it is yet another entry on 2002's menu of verbally profuse constitutional offerings. Its length is due in large part to the specificity sought by its sponsors, who define pig penning as a first degree misdemeanor, punishable by a year in prison or a \$5,000 fine, or both, for each pig.

This amendment is a new strategy on the part of a loose affiliation of animal rights activists and environmental extremists. Their virulent hatred of their enemies is reflected in a statement by celebrity environmentalist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. last April: "Large-scale hog-producers are a greater threat to the United States and U.S. democracy than Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network."

Florida ranks 30th in the nation in pig farming, sending about 100,000 pigs to market in 2000, with sales reaching about \$5 million. Cattle ranchers, on the other hand, accounted for about \$300 million in sales. Florida's lack of pig farmers, which translates to a lack of opposition, as well as the ease of amending our state's constitution is the apparent inspiration for this attack on our constitution. The first victory is usually the most difficult for radicals, thus making it the most important.

Amendment No. 11

Sponsor: Education Excellence for Florida

Reference: Article IX Section 7

Title: Local Trustees and Statewide Governing Board to Manage Florida's University System

Amendment No. 11 is U.S. Sen. Bob Graham's effort to thwart the realignment of

the state's education system that was proposed by Gov. Jeb Bush and enacted by state lawmakers.

That realignment was motivated by a constitutional amendment enacted in 1998 that put accountability for public education squarely on the shoulders of the governor. The governor and legislature gave the new board of education seamless control over the education system, from pre-kindergarten through to post-graduate programs. In doing so, the Board of Regents, which had managed higher education, was abolished and local boards of trustees were created to administer each of the state universities.

While originally controversial, most of the early critics now support the new system. Amendment No. 11 would return the education system to a hybrid of the new and the old, by keeping the local boards of trustees while resurrecting the Board of Regents to take control of universities from the new board of education.

Proponents of Amendment No. 11 say it will reduce political meddling in state universities. Critics complain that it will strip Florida of the unified K-20 policy approach of the new system, while transferring accountability over state colleges from elected officials to an independent body that is not answerable to the electorate.

Election-year posturing has stained the petition drive. Graham, who is not up for election, is Florida's most popular Democrat. As State Democratic Party Chairman Bob Poe has observed, Graham's active presence in the fight over Amendment No. 11 "forces Bush to fight a two-front battle."

While Amendment No. 11 enjoys limited support, it is still likely to gain passage because, apparently, a majority of voters believes that the fact that an amendment appears on the ballot is reason enough to vote for it. ■

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Following the Trail

by Jacquelyn Horkan, *Editor*

There were 178 candidates in 13 days. One hundred seventy eight interviews over 89 hours in seven cities.

AIF's candidate interview process is the most extensive and thorough of any other in the state. Every single candidate for state legislative office receives a 39-page profile and issue questionnaire. The documents are followed up by 30-minute face-to-face meetings between the candidates and AIF members along with the association's political and governmental affairs staff. Those that don't meet with association members are subjected to an audience with the political staff.

The knowledge and impressions gained help AIF and its politically active members allocate their campaign resources to greater effect.

"After sitting through the interviews, we got involved in some races that we'd already decided to sit out on," says Rheb Harbison, senior governmental consultant at the Tallahassee law firm of Carlton Fields, P.A.

Harbison, with the help of some of his partners, attended every interview, using them to make campaign-contribution decisions and to glean candidates' opinions about key matters of policy.

The interviews are the work of AIF's political operations department and its senior vice president, Marian P. Johnson, a long-time veteran of Florida politics who successfully bridges the gap between Democrat and Republican.

"She's like a central station. She gets all the rumors. She does the polling," says



To find out who the AIF Political Action Committee will be supporting in the general elections, visit the "Main Information Center" on FBNNET (<http://fbnnet.com>).



Robert A. Hugli, senior vice president for governmental affairs of the Florida Phosphate Council. "I've been doing this for more than 25 years and I have a pretty good sense of what to do, but sometimes it just comes down to, 'Marian, who should I back in this race?'"

The candidate interviews are just the beginning of a busy campaign season for the AIF political team, that includes campaign support and voter-education in selected campaigns. The staff's immersion in reapportionment earlier this year gave it an advantage: unduplicated knowledge about the new legislative districts, including what kind of candidate could win in each and which were toss-ups between the parties.

"What Marian does, I can't do on my own," says Hugli. "I don't have the staff or the time."

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and this scenario certainly would have favored Janet Reno. Daryl Jones' 11.6 percent chipped away at Reno's base in South Florida. In fact, 21 percent of Jones' 156,000 votes came from Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. Reno was popular in South Florida's black communities, which favored Jones. Historically high turnout rates in her home counties, combined with her greater popularity among Jones's core supporters, increased the likelihood that a McBride-Reno match-up would have ended in Reno's favor.

This one also goes as a win in the Democratic column.

The 2002 election season will go down in history as one of the most important in recent memory for the state's Democratic Party.

With an overwhelming Republican majority in the House, and a strong majority in the Senate, the Democrats have focused their efforts on preserving their legislative seats and on winning the races for governor and attorney general. If they are unsuccessful, Republican lawmakers will enjoy an unprecedented level of control in Tallahassee.

In this political chess game that began in the wake of the nation's most controversial presidential election, the Democrats, at least to this point, seem to have outplayed their Republican counterparts. ■

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