



## Florida's Future State and County Policies: 2010 Elections Will Be Significant in Future Policy Choices<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Implications of the 2010 election cycle on policy decisions at the state and county level in Florida will be enormous. Some people might argue that is the case with every election in the state, so what makes the 2010 election cycle any different? The purpose and intent of this fact sheet is to explain why the 2010 election cycle differs from previous election cycles and to note some of the policy issues those elected in 2010 will be debating and may be legislating that will have long-term implications for the state.

### 2010 Florida Elections

#### *Federal*

At the federal level, Floridians will have the opportunity, as they do every two years to elect the state's 25-member congressional delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives. The federal representatives are elected by district<sup>3</sup> and voters can only vote for candidates who represent the district in which they reside.

Floridians also have the opportunity to elect a United States (U.S.) Senator to represent the state.

The elected senator from Florida resigned before completion of his current term, a replacement for the remainder of the term has been appointed by the Governor and the seat is open for the state's primary and general election cycle in 2010. All Floridians who vote in 2010 are eligible to cast a vote for the state's U.S. Senator.

#### *State*

Every two years, all 120 seats in the Florida House of Representative are up for election and 2010 is no exception. At the same time, 20 of the 40 Florida Senate seats are open for election. Article III, Section 15 of the Florida Constitution specifies that in even-numbered years, not divisible by four, that Florida Senators from even-numbered Florida Senate Districts (there are 40 State Senate Districts in Florida) will be elected by voters in the state. In addition, three other senate seats (Senate Districts 25, 27, and 35) typically not up for election in 2010 will need to be filled because current office holders are resigning to run for state-level cabinet positions. State senators and representatives are elected by district; voters can only vote for candidates who represent the district in which they reside.

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1. This is EDIS document FE827, a publication of the Food and Resource Economics Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Published February 2010. Please visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Florida's State House and Senate members, as well as the Governor and other cabinet members (Attorney General, Chief Financial Officer, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services) and the Lt. Governor are prohibited by Article VI, Section 4 of the Florida Constitution of serving more than eight years in the same office. In Florida, seven members of the Florida Senate, all from even-numbered districts, are term limited. All these districts would have been up for election this year. However, what this implies is these seven districts will not have incumbents running for re-election. The Florida House of Representative has a similar situation. Twenty-four house districts (out of 120) have term-limited members, implying that those districts will not have incumbents running for re-election.

The 2010 elections are also unique because it marks the first time in Florida's history that the Governor and Cabinet seats, which consist of the Attorney General, Chief Financial Officer, and the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, are all up for election without any incumbents running for election. This has come about because the Governor is running for the U.S. Senate seat, the Attorney General and the Chief Financial Officer are running for Governor, and the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services is term-limited and prevented from running for re-election. All these positions are elected on a statewide vote.

### **Local**

Many local government officials will be part of the 2010 primary<sup>4</sup> and general<sup>5</sup> elections, including county commissioners, school boards members, some municipal commissioners, and other local elected boards. Florida Statute 100.041 (2)(a) states that "each county commissioner from an even-numbered district shall be elected at the general election in each even-numbered year the number of which is not a multiple of four." Sometimes unnoticed and forgotten, over 130 county commissioners will be elected in 2010. These individuals are the lead policy and decision makers in Florida's 67 counties. For complete information on local election information, individuals should contact their County Supervisor of elections.

### **Other Important 2010 State Election Issues**

Voters in the 2010 general election will also have the opportunity to vote on at least four proposed constitutional amendments. Amendment numbers and titles approved for the ballot as of December 2009 include:

- Amendment #1: Repeal of Public Campaign Finance Requirement
- Amendment #2: Homestead Ad Valorem Tax Credit for Deployed Military Personnel
- Amendment #3: Property Tax Limit for Non-Homestead Property; Additional Homestead Exemption for New Homestead Owners
- Amendment #4: Referenda Required for Adoption and Amendment of Local Government Comprehensive Land Use Plans

The Florida Legislature placed the first three amendments on the ballot. Amendment #4 was a citizen initiative sponsored by the group Florida Hometown Democracy, Inc., PAC. It is beyond the scope of this fact sheet to discuss these amendments in detail, but Florida voters need to become aware what changes these amendments would make in the Florida Constitution if passed (requires 60 percent of the voters approving in the 2010 general election).

There is some speculation that one or two more amendments could be added to the ballot before the 2010 election (citizen-led amendments must be filed with the Secretary of State by February 1, 2010, and the legislature can propose amendments during session). Most speculation is other amendments could be added related to congressional and legislative redistricting.

### **The Importance of the 2010 Elections**

The diversity, scope, and size of policy issues that individuals elected in 2010 will make decisions on at the federal, state, and county level are massive, and will impact Floridians for many years after the 2010 elections. The issues that will be addressed by those elected in 2010 are large, complex, and so

exhaustive in number that it is even difficult to make a list of what might be included. Just consider some of the following:

*Fiscal and Budget Issues* – Although maybe not as severe as in fiscal year 2009–2010, tax revenues are expected to be tight for several more years. What services will be provided at the federal, state, and local levels of government? Unlike the federal budget, state and local budgets must be balanced, so expenses and revenues are as close to equal as possible. Federal stimulus funds used to balance many budgets this current fiscal year are not expected beyond fiscal year 2010–2011.

*Health Care Issues* – Rapidly rising costs, large numbers of people without insurance, and a greater share of budgets at both the national and state level have increased attention on health care programs. The same concerns are present in Florida, and with state budgets ravaged by the economic downturn, health care programs have not been exempt from reduced funding.

*Economic Development Issues* – The recent economic downturn has increased attention on economic development in the state, counties, and cities. Job creation seems to be on everyone's mind. Are those jobs created through recruitment of firms? Are the jobs created internally through entrepreneurial approaches? Are incentives needed to create jobs? If incentives are needed to create jobs, what will it cost and for how long.

*Growth Management, Land Use, and Water Issues* – All three remain big issues in Florida. Concern has shifted from the state population growing rapidly to the population growing at a slower pace. Water concerns internal to the state and with neighboring states (Georgia and Alabama) remain in the news, although initial court decisions have been favorable to Florida on the latter issue. Withdrawals of water from Florida's rivers (e.g., St. Johns) are receiving increased attention again.

*Environmental Issues (Offshore Drilling)* – A short time ago, discussing offshore oil drilling along Florida's Gulf coast was only a remote possibility. That is no longer the case. The issue will be addressed in some form during the 2010 Florida legislative

session and beyond, whether in committees or an actual floor vote. Individuals, governments, and lobbying groups are already actively engaged in this policy debate.

*Legislative Reapportionment* – Not many people are aware that those elected in 2010 will have a major influence on state, local, and congressional districts (legislative boundaries) under current state law, especially federal and state districts, for elective offices. Florida's constitution currently grants the decision to establish state and congressional districts (political boundaries) to the state legislature. The task is to be completed by 2012. Historically, it can be argued that the political party in power at the time of reapportionment draws those boundaries so that power is retained in the future.

## We the People

What is the role of Florida residents with regard to the elections and policies that will result from the 2010 election? Citizens can start with the four steps identified below:

### Step 1. Register to Vote

Without taking this first step, you have no influence on who is elected or what policies they might enact. You can register to vote by contacting the supervisor of elections office in your county. Look in the *blue pages* of your local phonebook under County Government specifically for elections or voter registration and call for more information. You can also find more detail online from the Florida Secretary of State at <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/>.

Florida requires that you must be registered for at least 29 days before you can vote. Florida is a closed primary state, which means only registered voters and members of a political party (Democrat or Republican currently) may vote for their respective party's candidates in a primary election. Voters with no party affiliation are not eligible to vote for party candidates in a primary election. However, if all candidates for an office have the same party affiliation and the winner will have no opposition in the general election, regardless of party affiliation, all qualified voters can vote in the primary election for that office.

The last day to register this year for the primary election is July 26, 2010, and the last day to register for the general election is October 4, 2010.

### **Step 2. Educate Yourself about the Candidates**

Candidates have until June to qualify for statewide, multi-county, and countywide offices. However, that does not mean that you have to wait until then to familiarize yourself with those running for office. Candidates already indicating they are running for statewide races, including U.S. Senator, U.S. Federal Representative, Governor, Attorney General, Chief Financial Officer, Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Senate, and Florida House of Representatives, are identified online at the Florida Secretary of State Web page at <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/candidate/CanList.asp>.

For county races you need to contact the local Supervisor of Elections for information.

### **Step 3. Educate Yourself about the Issues**

It is never too early to start educating yourself about issues, especially issues you will be asked to vote on directly such as constitutional amendments. The Florida Secretary of State Webpage currently has basic information available online for review at <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/initiatives/initiativelist.asp?year=2010&initstatus=ALL&MadeBallot=Y&ElecType=GEN>.

As of January 2010, only the ballot title, the sponsoring organization, and the full text of the constitutional amendment are available online at the Florida Secretary of State Webpage. However, sometime early in 2010 expect to find more information and analyses on the constitutional amendments. Look for information that identifies the pluses and minuses (pros and cons) of the amendments, presents information in an unbiased manner, and does not tell you how to vote on the amendment.

### **Step 4. Be Sure to Vote**

For federal, state, and county offices, the primary election will be held on August 24, 2010, and the general election will be held on November 2, 2010.

While it is important to register to vote, it is equally as important to actually vote if eligible in the two elections held in 2010. Most people will vote twice (primary and general) in 2010.

## **Summary**

The 2010 elections in Florida will be important in adopting policies on a variety of issues that will have lasting impacts in Florida for more than a decade. Those eligible to register to vote need to educate themselves about the candidates running for office and important policy issues, and be sure to vote in the primary and general elections. George Nathan is quoted as saying that "bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote." Likewise, the policy choices of those elected are also often determined by good citizens who do not vote.

In 2010, Floridians will be able to vote for candidates to fill a U.S. Senate seat, all Florida Congressional seats, the entire Florida cabinet (Governor, Attorney General, Chief Financial Officer, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services) with no current incumbents running for positions, all 120 seats in the Florida House of Representatives, 23 Florida Senate seats, over 130 county commissioners, and an unknown number of city and school board seats. Florida will have a larger than typical number of elected offices in the state House and Senate races where incumbents will not be up for re-election. Additionally, many important policy decisions related to land, water, environment, health care, economic development, and budget issues will be made by those elected in 2010. The year 2010 will be an important year for Floridians to become engaged in the election and the policies made by those elected.

## **References**

Florida Secretary of State.  
<http://election.dos.state.fl.us/>

Florida Secretary of State.  
<http://election.dos.state.fl.us/candidate/CanList.asp>

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[http://www.flsenate.gov/Welcome/  
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#### Additional Notes:

3. District: The geographical area from which a state senator, representative, or congressman is elected. The boundaries of state legislative and congressional districts are re-drawn after each decennial census. Legislative and congressional districts are not matching.
4. The primary election is held to choose the candidate who will receive the nomination from his or her political party.
5. The general election determines the candidate elected to office based on those nominated by the various political parties or those who ran as no party affiliated (NPA) or as a write-in candidate.