Committee: Senate Ethics & Elections

Bill #: SB 686, passed with Senators Legg, Smith and Braynon voting against the bill

Date/Time of Meeting: January 12, 2015; 2 to 4 PM

Please list the names of all LWV representatives present: Peter Butzin, Marilynn Wills

Issue(s) of concern:

Overall tone of meeting: Common Cause and the Florida Commission on Ethics spoke in favor of the bill. The Tea Party Network and the Liberty First Network waived their time in support. The Associated Contractors spoke in favor, but want to continue to work with Senator Gaetz to ensure that the bill does not prevent exchange of gifts between contractors and subcontractors in situations where there is not a quid pro quo exchanged for favorable action. The Community Hospitals favor the bill, now that it has been amended to prevent private funds from being used to pay severance beyond 20 weeks. The League of Cities indicated that it would prefer to exempt smaller cities from the lobby and financial disclosure requirements.

Senator Gaetz amended his SB 686 to include the same language contained in SB 582. The combined bill should be considered an omnibus ethics bill, a fulfillment of the ethics bill passed in 2013, but which adds a lower burden of proof for fighting corruption.)

Is there any follow-up needed? If so, please explain:

I urge the LWV to support this bill, and related bills SB 582, and HB 593, The bill lowers the standard to prosecute public corruption cases. Instead of requiring proof of “corrupt intent”, the new standard for prosecution would be “knowingly and intentionally” request, solicit, accept, or agree to accept a pecuniary benefit in return for a public policy action. This is one of two, major anti-corruption bill in this session. The bill extends Florida’s ethics laws to quasi-governmental agencies, tightens financial and lobby disclosure requirements for local government, provides the Florida Commission on Ethics with the power to self-initiate complaints, and requires lobbyists to report monthly regarding their issues of interest, among other reforms.