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Guest commentary: Women Voters takes stands on amendments, initiatives

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Collier County voters will have the opportunity to vote on six proposed amendments to the Florida Constitution and two proposed local ballot initiatives when they go to the polls in the coming weeks, starting Monday with early voting.

Given our mission to encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy, the League of Women Voters of Collier County appreciates the opportunity to share our positions on these proposals. Note: There are only six amendments on the ballot. There is no Amendment 2 or 5.

The League Supports Amendment 1: State Budget and Planning Process. As a matter of policy, we support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs. We also believe that a system is needed to measure effectiveness of expenditures of tax dollars in order to provide fiscal accountability and responsibility.

The League of Women Voters of Collier County opposes Amendment 3: Broader Public Support for Constitutional Amendments and Petitions.

"Democracy," according to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, can be defined simply as "majority rule." Passage of this amendment would greatly limit citizens' access to the democratic process.

Amendment 3 would require a supermajority vote of 60 percent to amend the Constitution, rather than the current simple majority (50 percent plus one), making it harder — not easier — for the majority to rule in Florida.

In fact, Amendment 3 would guarantee that the minority rules, because if our citizens proposed something that would make Florida a better place to live and work, opponents would only have to rally two out of five voters to defeat it. Passage of Amendment 3 would greatly limit citizens' access to the democratic process.

Our initiative process has served Floridians well. Through ballot initiatives, voters have protected sport fishing, cleaned up the Everglades, improved education by mandating smaller class sizes and universal prekindergarten, cleaned up the air in our restaurants, saved taxpayers and homeowners millions of dollars through homestead exemptions, increased government accountability through term limits and open records laws and spurred the economy by raising wages. Florida's constitutional amendment process has made Florida a better place.

We should not make it harder.

Clearly, not all citizen initiatives belong in the Constitution. The passage in 2002 of an amendment forbidding the keeping of pregnant pigs in crates comes readily to mind. No doubt this will be used over and over in the coming weeks to make the case for a vote in favor of Amendment 3. But we believe it is better to constitutionally protect pregnant pigs than to sacrifice the citizen initiative process. Vote No on Amendment 3.

The League Opposes Amendment 4: Protect People, Especially Youth, from Addiction, Disease and Other Health Hazards of Using Tobacco. The League believes that this issue should be addressed by statute rather than by amending the Constitution. In addition, the League believes that no source of revenue should be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the Constitution.

The League Opposes Amendment 6: Increased Homestead Exemption. The League believes that no source of revenue should be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the Constitution. Therefore, we believe that there should be no increase or extension of the homestead exemption.

The League Opposes Amendment 7: Permanently Disabled Veterans' Discount on Homestead Ad Valorem Tax. The League believes that no source of revenue should be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the Constitution. Therefore, we believe there should be no increase or extension of the homestead exemption.

The League has no position on Amendment 8: Eminent Domain.

We have not studied the issue.

Collier County ballot initiatives

The League Supports Conservation Collier: Acquisition and Management of Environmentally Sensitive Lands, Water Resources Lands and Public Open Space.

The continuation of Conservation Collier will not create new taxes. It would simply continue the present levy of \$25 for each \$100,000 of taxable property value through 2013. Voters said "Yes" in 2002 to bond up to \$75 million over a 10-year period, but in only four years we have almost reached our bonding limit. Voting "Yes" again will continue the same one-quarter of a mill rate for the balance of the full 10 years, raising more money to protect more land.

Requirement for Adequate Road Capacity. The League has not studied this issue, and therefore has no position on it, either in support or opposition.

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