

“IN YOUR FACE”

FLORIDA’S 2010 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

After 12 years involved with growth issues in Florida legislative sessions, this one has got to be the worst. The elected officials are playing a very dangerous game where the people have become the enemy (we don’t know what we’re talking about), and their focus has become winning their issue at any cost. Most of them do not see the culture they are working in is not reality. It is a twisted form of democracy where rules are meant to be waived and the special interest money machine fed.

From the very beginning it was obvious that all tricks of the trade were going to be used, and we have not been disappointed. Over 65 “shell” bills were filed in the Senate relating to growth and local governments. These are the place holder bills stating their legislative intent to change something. Many of these shell bills have come alive with language week by week. How do you conduct thoughtful dialogue on an issue when you don’t know what the bill says until it is being heard in a committee?

The House didn’t play this kind of game, they played a different one. They only filed nine growth bills at the beginning of session. Why show their hand when they can churn out their work hiding behind committees? Starting the second week of session, huge water bills came alive in House committees. Only one is actually good regarding our drinking water. The rest we are still trying to kill.

This year’s new tactic hiding things in bills is called reorganizing statutes into new sections and stating that none of the language has changed. (See HB 1109 Water Supply bill). The danger of this bill is what you don’t see. Only part of the legislative intent from the original statute was used, which changes the entire focus of supplying water in this state. Great for water authorities who want to create new alternative water supplies. They won’t have to worry about those pesky environmental or health and safety concerns of the public.

Then we have the BIG Economic Stimulus bill SB 1752 that included language very harmful to our environment and water permitting (over 80 pages) that was heard in one committee and then went straight to the floor for a vote! The environmentally harmful sections of the bill were stripped away, but no one yet has said where the \$100 million up front money will come from to spur the economy.

After this came SB 6 Education bill. Talk about ramming something through the system. It was so bad Gov. Crist had to veto it.

The usual standby tactic of replacing the language of a bill with a strike-all amendment which no one has seen prior to the committee meeting is alive and well. HB 7177 started the meeting as a 6 page water conservation bill and ended as a 22 page rewrite of many water issues including wetland mitigation banks and consumptive use permits.

This committee was the ONLY one has been heard, and is now going to the House floor for vote. This is democracy?

Finally, in a glorious display of distaste and contempt for the public, SB 2288 was heard last week by the Reapportionment Committee in the Senate. Remember, this is the bill that will counteract the two ballot initiatives for Fair Districts. Group after group filed opposition cards to this bill and waived their time speaking. Many of the committee members demanded they come to the podium only to be chastised for their opinion. Comments from the committee included, "We know more about this, we are the experts" to "How dare you object without talking to us". Only one group supported this "clarifying" bill – Associated Industries. Need I say more?

The legislators get away with this behavior because we let them. Enough is enough. Pay attention to how they act and vote on this year's nasty bills, and vote them out of office. We, the people, have to change this unreality show.

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