Make Your Vote Count in 2012

Is Florida’s Elections Reform bill really voter suppression in disguise? Under the ruse of fraud prevention, the bill changed the rules for the number of early voting days, requirements and deadlines for registering voters, updating voter registration information, and provisional ballots. Even if this is a deliberate act to disenfranchise and eliminate political involvement, make your vote count by being knowledgeable of the procedural changes that could impact voting opportunities. Learn more about voter requirements, rights, and responsibilities in the 2011-2012 Florida’s Voter Registration and Voting Guide at http://election.dos.state.fl.us/publications/pdf/2011/2011-2012_VoterRegGuide.pdf.

- The 2012 primary election is August 14—two weeks earlier than usual. The general election is November 6.
- The deadline to register to vote in Florida is 29 days prior to an election. The 2012 primary deadline is July 16, and the general election deadline is October 9.
- Election Day registration is unavailable in Florida.
- Early voting is reduced from 14 days to eight days. The 2012 primary dates are August 4—11 and general election dates are October 27—November 3.
- Early voting for elections that contains a state or federal race begins 10 days before an election and ends on the 3rd day before an election.
- Absentee ballots can be requested from the Supervisor of Elections. A request must be made before 5 p.m. six days before the election.
- Voters who have moved or changed their name since the last election can only update their status at the polls if they have moved within the same county. All others must cast provisional ballots.
- Third-party groups that register new voters must submit forms within 48 hours or face fines of up to $1,000.
- You will need to present a current picture and signature identification (ID). If your photo ID does not contain your signature, you will need to show a form of ID that provides your signature. Acceptable forms of ID are: Florida driver’s license, U.S. passport, student or military or public assistance identification.

Redistricting/Reapportionment

The 2012 redistricting process is well underway. Why is this important? District boundaries of congressional and state legislative electoral districts determine which voters participate in which elections for choosing representatives in the U.S. House, State Senate, and State House. This process occurs every ten years based on the latest decennial census data. Concerns run rampant whether proposed changes will comply with the “one-person, one-vote doctrine,” (1962 Supreme Court Baker vs. Carr – Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution) that is, redrawing district lines to reflect population shifts and growth as well as maintain a balance in voting strength amongst all voters from district to district.

The Florida Senate staffers have drawn up maps for congressional and state Senate districts. As the Senate Reapportionment Committee discusses the proposals, political advocacy groups will be watching to insure that the proposed redistricting does not minimize or dilute (a.k.a. retrogression) the voting strength of racial or other minorities. Proposals should also comply with the requirements of the Fair Districts Standards (FairDistrictsNow.org) to protect the rights of minorities to elect candidates of their choice in districts across the state while drawing more compact districts. Visit the House Redistricting and Senate Reapportionment websites for information, schedules, records, maps, and plans.

The Senate – www.flsenate.gov/redistricting
The House – www.floridaredistricting.org

Register to Vote

To register to vote you must be 18 years of age, a citizen of the United States of America and a legal resident of Florida and of the county where you intend to vote. Get an application from your local Supervisor of Elections office, the Division of Elections, any federal and state-designated voter registration agency or download and print the form from the Division of Elections website at: http://election.dos.state.fl.us/pdf/webappform.pdf.
Utility Deposits

Economic times are tight and our city has done a great deal to ease the burden on families while creating an environment for businesses to grow and prosper. The city’s residential rates are now below state average and our small business electric rates are among the lowest in the state, yet, we continue to explore avenues to ease the pain on residents and to lessen the impact of the initial deposit payment for small business startups.

The City Commission is reviewing current policies and possible initiatives to modify existing commercial customers’ utility account deposit requirements as a means to promote local economic activity and support job creation. Some ideas being considered and evaluated for feasibility are noted below.

- Reduce the good credit threshold from five years to three years to achieve Premier Customer Status.
- Automatically refund (rather than only upon request) Premier Customers for a reduced deposit amount of one month’s average bill.
- Include option to be billed the security deposit over a six-month period instead of paying the entire deposit up front.

The proposal will be presented at the December 7, City Commission meeting for discussion and approval.

Local Business Certification Program (LBCP)

Over $500,000 in contracts have been awarded to local businesses since the LBCP was initiated in March 2011. The LBCP offers 10 to 20 percent preference in bid and contracting opportunities. The program has over 475 certified businesses. At a September 2011 brainstorming session, several business owners shared ideas on how to improve the process. Staff has incorporated some of their ideas and is addressing concerns that were presented. Immediate procedures being enacted are:

- Develop and include a searchable directory on the talgov.com website and provide it to other governmental and professional organizations.
- Improve notification for vendor training sessions.
- Make support staff available to assist local vendors.

Other ideas were presented that require further analysis and review by city departments and the City Commission. Learn more about the LBCP or apply on-line at http://www.talgov.com/dma/procurement/businesscert.cfm.

My City, My Government

Annika Berentsen, an Astoria Park Elementary School 2010-2011 Tal War Grotto 3rd Place Essay Contest winner, declared in her winning essay “An Excellent Citizen,” that being a citizen is super important! She wrote, “If you are a good citizen you would help the community in various ways. For example, recycling, conserving natural resources, and helping others demonstrate good citizenship.”

Colin Barrineau, a 13 year old Raa Middle School 7th grader took his Florida City Government Week Recognition Program seriously. He wrote, “Dear Mr. Gillum, I have a major concern about a dangerous blind spot on Fred George road off Monroe Street.” He provided a detailed description, pictures, and a request for preventative measures. He concluded his letter with, “I know our city managers care about the people who live here and their safety. For that reason I feel certain this concern will be addressed. I look forward to seeing changes very soon in this area.” City staff investigated the situation and trimmed the vegetation to the right-of-way that was blocking the view of drivers. Great job Colin!!!

Know More Government

The City promotes "Know More Government", through various venues (e.g., talgov.com, WCOT Cable Channel 13, e-newsletters, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) for our citizens to learn about what we do. We also go outside of City Hall to get feedback, address issues, share visioning and goals, and volunteer. A few of my 2011 event contacts included:

- FSU, FAMU and TCC student government officers and organizations; journalism and leadership classes; USSA National Student Congress; and student voter rallies.
- Black history programs and civic classes at Godby High, Lincoln High, Griffin Middle, Nims Middle, PACE Secondary, Innovation School, and Brownsville Prep.
- Leon and Jacksonville Young Democrats, and Jefferson and Wakulla County Democratic Executive Committees.
- Interfaith Clergy Group, North Florida Certified Public Managers, Tallahassee Builders Association, and Richview Neighborhood.

“Serving is Leading”

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"Our Youth, Our Future"

“See Something, Say Something, Do Something”

Various brainstorming sessions were held with youth; a host of community partners in the field of youth services, education and delinquency; United Human Services Partners; the Police Department; and the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs Department to explore what youth consider to be their primary needs/interests and how to address the growing trend in violence among youth in Tallahassee. Youth at the “Youth Safety” town hall meeting on May 4, 2011 voted jobs as their top priority. Also ranked high on their list were mentoring programs.

City staff conducted extensive research of other successful programs, analyzed our current practices, and formulated action steps towards a more encompassing youth program. Nine action steps were presented and approved at the October 26, 2011 City Commission meeting, agenda item #10. A synopsis is below.

1. Establish a broader based Tallahassee teen council.
2. Create an inter-department working group to consolidate resources.
3. Partner with Leon County Schools system to build a successful mentoring program.
4. Distribute the Big Bend Cares 411 Resource Guide.
5. Expand current life skills educational offerings.
6. Expand life skills programming to all the community centers.
7. Continue Splash and Jam concept and possibly expand it throughout the year.
8. TPD officers serve as liaisons with the community centers.
9. Implement and promote the “See Something, Say Something, Do Something” public education campaign.

1,000 Mentors

“Girls/Guys Gone Wild” doesn’t have to be a label for our youth. That’s playing into the emotions of people’s fears. Help change the commentary by serving as a mentor. Many young people often want a way out but don’t know how to take the first step. Mentoring can help them realize their potential and lead them into principled aspirations and responsible actions. Young people need mentors and individual inspirers to be in their lives to set expectations for them and to hold them accountable of those expectations. Mentoring will be emphasized as part of the "See Something, Say Something, Do Something” campaign with January 2012 designated as “Mentoring Month.” E-mail me at Andrew.gillum@talgov.com if you would like to volunteer to serve as a mentor.

“Student Leadership"

PMTC Developing Leaders

Janea Powell participated in a recent Student Leadership Conference hosted by the Palmer Munroe Teen Center (PMTC) and the Tallahassee Police Department. As a member of the PMTC teen advisory board, various church, community, and other extracurricular organizations, Janea found the experience beneficial towards developing her leadership potential. She gleaned several tips from the forum to improve her presentation skills.

- Carry yourself with confidence.
- Know your material.
- Practice before you make your presentation.
- Appearance matters – dress for the occasion.
- As a presenter you should dress one level higher than those you’re presenting to but do not over dress.
- Make your first impression a great impression.

FAMU & TCC SGA Shadow Day

The President of the Student Government (also known generically as Student Body President) is the highest ranking officer of a student government or student union association on the high school, college, or university level. Respected as one of the highest honored roles to achieve during academic studies, serving as President can enable a student to gain strong interpersonal, leadership, social, economic, and management skills.

Having served as a member of student government in high school and as Florida A&M University’s SGA President in my senior year, it was familiar stomping ground to shadow Breyon Love, the 2011-2012 SGA President for FAMU and Tallahassee Community College Student Body President, Franzlyne Jean-Louis. Shadowing them to their classes, interacting with their peers, and discussing issues with their SGA General Assembly were reminders that investing in our youth today will help secure our prospects for a better tomorrow.

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Leadership Florida Class XXX members from the northwest region gather for a welcome reception in September. Leadership Florida is an eight-month training and development program that provides a comprehensive look at the major issues facing Floridians today. (Photo by Jack Levine, Founder 4Generations Institute.)

People For the American Way (PFAW) President Michael Keegan, Former US President Bill Clinton, PFAW Founding Chair Norman Lear, and Director of Youth Leadership Programs and Tallahassee City Commissioner Andrew Gillum attended PFAW Foundation’s 30th Anniversary Celebration in October in New York City. (Photo by Neilson Barnard/Getty Images for PFAW Foundation.)

The North Florida Chapter of Certified Public Managers welcomed elected officials Gillum and Nick Maddox to their May public service recognition event.

Employees were encouraged to push past the difficult moments, not buy in to the negative talk, continue to project their best and highest selves, and aim to leave government better than how they found it.

The November Art of Fitness Sweat-a-Thon was created to help raise funds for the Mary Brogan Museum of Arts and Sciences. It was hosted by Good Friends Group Fitness located at 1391 E. Lafayette Street. Five City employees (including Gillum) rode in the spin-a-thon for one hour each to raise a minimum of $100 each. (Photo by Allie Fleming, Owner, Good Friends Group Fitness)

Thanksgiving is a time to give thanks for life’s wonders, blessings, and even the challenges. President Obama’s American Jobs Act highlighted the gravity of what we face as a nation, a state, a city, and a government.

As presidential candidate, Barack Obama exclaimed the urgency of now. Little did he know that would continue to be a beckoning call for the present of humanity. I participated in a local Town Hall Meeting in October regarding the American Jobs Act and the need to do something to help preserve employment for all who want and need to work, benefits for veterans, education for our children, and other growth incentives for our community. The urgency to act is NOW!!!

During this season of giving thanks and sharing goodwill—let’s rejoice in our successes and remember those who are fearful of foreclosure, struggling to pay medical or utility bills, living homeless or on the brink of poverty. Let’s resolve for 2012 to reach out to those in despair, and congratulate those who excel. Let’s resolve to expand our imagination and stretch beyond our limitations. Let’s recommit to our responsibility to be accountable for our words and actions. Let’s treat each other (even those we may not like) humanely.

Thank you for your commitment to be an attentive and active contributor to building a better Tallahassee. There are many challenges before us in 2012 and much to be done. Let’s go forward in unity.

Call my office at 850-891-8503 to schedule an appointment to share your items of interest or “friend” me on Facebook at: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Andrew-Gillum/233733121020

Happy Holidays

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