

Amendments 5 & 6 Deserve Voter Scrutiny

by **Barney Bishop**

Barney Bishop Barney is the president and CEO of Associated Industries of Florida which is known as The Voice of Florida Business. AIF was founded in 1920 and is commonly referred to by the state press as “the most powerful business association in the state.” A native-born Floridian and an Eagle Scout, he founded two successful companies prior to joining AIF – a private detective agency in Orlando in the 70’s and 80’s, and a strategic public affairs firm in Tallahassee for 12 years. He graduated from Emerson College in Boston, MA where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in both Political and Judicial Communication and in History.

One of the hallmarks of our democracy is the right for members from every community to have their voices heard and participate in government. While not perfect, Florida’s system of representative democracy has resulted one of the most diverse groups of elected officials in the nation.

This November, Florida voters will decide whether to continue using the same system that has helped to increase minority participation in government, or adopt a new system with strict requirements and uncertain outcomes. The goal of these requirements is noble – to create fairness in the manner Florida’s political districts are drawn – but unfortunately, they go too far, are unworkable, and could potentially jeopardize the progress Florida has made creating opportunities for all individuals to serve in their government.

These claims are confirmed by a recent analysis by the non-partisan James Madison Institute. In their recent report on the amendments, the Institute found that “Enactment of the confusing and contradictory standards mandated in Amendment 5 would increase the likelihood that any redistricting plan devised by the Florida Legislature would be subject to protracted litigation and would ultimately be replaced by a plan devised by appointed judges rather than by the people’s elected representatives.” Others have cited their inability to achieve the fairness they set out to create. According to MIT scholar Dr. Daniel Loeb, the amendments “do not achieve the goal of creating balanced, competitive congressional districts.”

As someone who has spent much of his career in Florida elections, Former Florida Secretary of State and longtime Pasco County Supervisor of Elections Kurt Browning has been urging voters to say “no” to Amendments 5 and 6. Secretary Browning has been warning voters of the unintended consequences of the amendments that will throw Florida’s elections process into chaos. Florida has learned there is nothing more important than clear, implementable elections laws, and if passed, Amendments 5 and 6 would create murky standards that would become nearly impossible to change.

Florida’s constitution is sacred, and like our nation’s founding document, it should not become cluttered with policy initiatives simply because they can’t be advanced through the current system. Floridians deserve an open

dialogue on how we can make our current elections system better without adding requirements that will prove to be too restrictive and not as inclusive.

Just as our communities reflect a diversity unparalleled by any other state in the United States, so too should our elected officials. In their current form, Amendments 5 and 6 would do more harm than good to the progress Florida has made to increase opportunities for minorities to serve in government. According to the non-partisan Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Amendments 5 and 6 “do not provide greater protections for minority voters” and fail to include necessary language compatible with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Jeopardizing minority representation is a risk Florida simply cannot take.

By continuing to have an open dialogue, we can make Florida’s elections system a model for our nation. But passing Amendments 5 and 6 are not the answer.

Ideas In Action

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