

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based only on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: SB 1652

SPONSOR: Committee on Ethics and Elections, Senator Saunders, and others

SUBJECT: Florida Voter Information Guide

DATE: March 13, 2000 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Fox	Bradshaw	EE	Favorable
2.			FP	
3.				
4.				
5.				

I. Summary:

Senate Bill 1652 requires the chief election officer to create an on-line Florida Voter Information Guide containing information on candidates and proposed constitutional amendments. The chief election officer may also produce and distribute a non-electronic version of the guide.

The bill takes effect on January 1, 2001.

This bill creates unnumbered sections of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Senate Bill 1652 implements one of the recommendations in the committee interim project report entitled, *Strategies for Increasing Voter Participation in Florida* (October 1999). The report recommended directing the Division of Elections to create an on-line voter information guide to provide more information about candidates and ballot issues. A 1997 report by the Secretary of State's Blue Ribbon Panel on Elections endorsed a similar proposal. The recommendation addresses a concern voiced by Florida voters that there is not enough objective information available on which to base important electoral decisions.

A number of states already produce and distribute a voter information guide. California makes its voter information guide available on-line and mails it to every registered voter.

Some information about federal, statewide, judicial (other than county court), and legislative candidates in Florida is currently available on the Internet at Elections Online, the Florida Division of Elections' web site (<http://election.dos.state.fl.us/online/index.html>). The site also contains the ballot title, ballot summary, and full text of proposed constitutional amendments. However, no objective analysis of the impact of the proposed amendment or opposing arguments are presented.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Senate Bill 1652 requires the chief election officer to create an on-line Florida Voter Information Guide containing information on candidates and proposed constitutional amendments, prior to each general election and special election involving a constitutional amendment. The chief election officer may also produce and distribute a non-electronic version of the guide, and is granted rulemaking authority for this purpose.

Specifically, Senate Bill 1652 permits candidates who must qualify with the Department of State (federal, statewide, legislative, and multi-county candidates), other than judicial candidates, to submit a candidate statement of 250 words or less and a photograph to be included in the voter guide. Other candidate information which will be included in the guide includes: the candidate's name, office sought, political party, mailing address, campaign telephone number, and links to the candidate's e-mail address and web site.

Judicial candidates, other than county judge candidates, may also submit a candidate statement and photograph for inclusion in the voter guide. The candidate statement for judicial candidates must be in a prescribed resume format as opposed to a free-form essay, and may not exceed 500 words.

For proposed constitutional amendments, the guide will include information identifying the amendment, along with:

- Ballot title and summary;
- For amendments proposed by the Legislature, the number of votes for and against the measure in both the Senate and House of Representatives;
- A concise, non-technical, objective summary of the general meaning and effect of a “yes” and “no” vote on each measure, prepared by the Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (“OPPAGA”);
- The full text of the amendment;
- An argument in favor of the measure; and,
- An argument in opposition to the measure.

For amendments proposed by the Legislature, the prime sponsor of the joint resolution and another person appointed by the prime sponsor may draft the argument in favor of the measure. The argument in opposition may be drafted by members of the Senate and House who voted against the joint resolution. If no argument is filed or if the Legislature unanimously adopted the joint resolution, the chief election officer will solicit arguments from the general public. The chief election officer will rank the arguments received, according the highest rank to arguments submitted by political committees, followed by bona-fide organizations, and finally individual Florida registered voters. The highest-ranked argument which otherwise meets the requirements for inclusion in the guide will be placed on-line. If there is a tie, the chief election officer will select an argument at random from among the highest-ranked arguments.

For amendments proposed by citizen initiative or other group, the chair of the group proposing the amendment may appoint two persons to draft an argument in favor of the measure. The

opposing argument to be included in the guide is determined by soliciting arguments from the general public and then ranking them (see above).

Candidates and interested persons *are not required* to provide information for inclusion in the voter guide. However, the increasing importance of the Internet as a communications medium and a tool for gathering political information should be a strong encouragement to participate.

Committee staff has worked with the staff of the Division to integrate the proposed requirements of the bill into the structure the Division already has in place on its web site. The impact of Senate Bill 1652 will be to provide Floridians with more relevant information about candidates and constitutional amendments.

The bill contains a specific appropriation of \$100,000 to implement the provisions of the act.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Division estimates that it will cost \$100,000 to create and produce an Internet-only electronic version of the voter guide --- with most of the funds needed for additional staff. The bill contains a \$100,000 appropriation for this purpose. Presumably, the Division will seek funds for future voter guides through the normal budget request process.

The Division estimates that it would cost an additional \$1 million to design, publish, and distribute two million hard copies of the voter guide to over 7,000 sites within Florida,

including 67 county supervisor of elections offices, 450 public libraries, 1,000 sites within other state agencies that provide voter registration activities, and over 5,000 volunteer agencies such as banks, the Florida League of Women Voters, Florida Voters League, and other nonpartisan organizations.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
