

How to Vote on Florida's 12 Amendments-

Deciding how to vote on Florida's 12 Amendments can be a daunting task. Philosophically, "voter- initiated amendments" usurp our "Representative Constitutional Republic" and moves it closer to a democracy which our founders knew was a failed system of governance. In addition, some of the amendments on the ballot have been "bundled" meaning multiple issues appear under a single amendment, making the decision even more confusing.

With that said, the following is some guidance on the individual amendments:

Amendment 1-N0

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Florida already offers generous homestead exemptions totaling \$50,000 for property owners who make their full-time residence here. Adding another \$25,000 exemption would put pressure on local governments to raise property tax rates to make up for lost revenue.

Amendment 2- YES

Permanently places a 10-percent cap on the annual increase of non-homestead property tax assessments. The cap was put in place in 2008, but it's set to expire in 2019.

What owners of non-homestead properties face, should the amendment fail, is paying taxes on the full value of properties, beginning in January 2019. This could translate into higher costs for renters, financial burdens for those on fixed incomes, increased costs for consumers who shop at businesses and more costs for those who own undeveloped land.

Amendment 3- YES

Gives voters, instead of the Legislature, the exclusive right to decide whether a new facility offering casino-style games (slot machines, card games) can open in the state.

A yes vote will require a state-wide vote to expand casino gambling in the state.

Amendment 4-NO

Restores voting rights to former felons who served their sentence, including parole and probation, with the exception of those convicted of murder and sexual offenses.

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Currently, former felons must wait at least 5 years after completing their sentences to ask the Florida Clemency Board, made up by the governor and the Cabinet, to restore their rights.

Though this bill should automatically give voting rights to convicted felons except those convicted of murder and sexual offenses, it doesn't differentiate between people who commit other violent crimes and those who commit non-violent crimes.

Amendment 5-YES

Requires a two-thirds vote in the Florida House and Senate — instead of a simple majority — to raise state taxes.

It was placed on the ballot by the Legislature with the intent to make it more difficult for lawmakers to raise taxes. The amendment also stops a typical legislative technique of adding tax and fee increases onto other legislative bills.

Amendment 6-YES

Includes three separate proposals:

- Expands the scope of victims' rights under the Florida Constitution, including victims' rights to due process, under what's known as Marsy's Law;
- Raises the mandatory retirement age of Florida judges from 70 to 75;
- Prohibits state courts from deferring to an administrative agency's interpretation of a state statute or rule.

Though this is a bundled amendment with several separate proposals, all three are reasonable. Many Florida sheriffs and victim advocacy groups that believe courts have gone too far defending the rights of the accused. Also, administrative

agencies were never intended to interpret law. That is the courts constitutional job.

Amendment 7-YES

Includes three separate proposals:

- Requires mandatory payment of death benefits and waives some educational expenses to qualifying survivors of first responders and military members who die performing official duties, which is already in state law (and adds paramedics and emergency medical technicians to the list);
- Requires supermajority votes by university trustees and state university system boards of governors to raise or impose fees;
- Establishes the existing Florida College System as a constitutional entity.

Though again, a bundled proposal, the tenants of this amendment seem reasonable. It would make it more difficult to raise college fees, places former community colleges in the Florida College System, and gives death benefits and waives some educational expenses to qualifying survivors of first responders who die performing official duties.

Amendment 9-NO

Includes two separate proposals:

- Prohibits oil and gas drilling in offshore areas controlled by the state (but not federal waters);
- Prohibits the indoor use of e-cigarettes and vaping devices, with the exception of standalone bars or hotel rooms where smoking is allowed.

Yet another bundled proposal that one has nothing to do with the other. Though one may have a strong personal position on one of the proposals there is an attempt to move other state decisions that should be addressed on a case-by-case basis. The legislator needs to address these issues not enshrined in the Constitution.

Amendment 10-YES

Includes four proposals:

- Requires the Legislature to start its annual session in January instead of March during even-numbered years;

- Creates a counter-terrorism and security office within the Florida Department of Law Enforcement;
- Requires the state to have a Department of Veterans Affairs, which already exists.
- Requires that all 67 counties elect their sheriff, tax collector, elections supervisor and clerk of courts. Several Florida counties, such as Miami-Dade, now have at least one of these positions appointed.

Though, another bundled amendment, all proposals are reasonable.

Amendment 11-NO

Includes three proposals:

- Deletes language in the Constitution that prevents non-citizens from buying, selling, owning or inheriting property;
- Deletes language approving a high-speed rail, which Floridians voted against in 2004;
- Deletes the “Savings Clause,” which forbids making changes to criminal sentencing laws retroactive.

The are reasonable parts to this “bundled” amendment. However, the first proposal is important to maintain to keep state sovereignty.

Amendment 12-NO

Expands ethics rules for public officials — elected officials, judges and government employees — and essentially bans them from lobbying the state and federal governments during their terms of office and for six years after they leave office. The new rules are complex, but essentially they ban officials/employees from lobbying the state and federal government during their terms of office/employment and for 6 years after (currently the rule is 2 years).

The current rule is 2 years which is reasonable. This would also apply to any former elected official from working for any group that is required to file as a lobbyist including faith-based organizations.

Amendment 13- NO

Ends commercial greyhound and other dog racing by 2020 while allowing tracks to continue to offer other gaming activities such as card games.

This is clearly a back-door effort to expand gambling in the State. By removing the dog racing that requires specific rules which allow gaming activities, it will open the State up to allowing gaming expansion.

Referendum to Appointed School Superintendent- NO

With the current status of the School Board it would be unwise and dangerous to take this position out of the voters hands and into the school board's hands.