Too Important to Miss:
The 2017-2018 Florida Constitution Revision Commission

Carol S. Weissert, Ph.D.
Director, LeRoy Collins Institute
Florida State University
Background

• Florida has five ways to amend constitution
• Constitution Revision Commission (CRC)
  – Every 20 years
  – Puts items directly on ballot
  – 37 members
  – Will meet Summer 2017
  – Only third time in state’s history
1968 Constitution

• “...in the tenth year following that in which this constitution is adopted, and each twentieth year thereafter, there shall be established a constitution revision commission...”
• The commission shall..
  – Adopt its rules of procedure
  – Examine the constitution of the state, except for matters relating to taxation or the state budgetary process
  – Hold public hearings
  – Make recommendations for revisions to go to ballot in next general election
    • Article XI, Section 2 (c) Florida Constitution
“It is my own personal judgment that above all other matters, the new provisions in the 1968 Constitution authorizing means for further constitutional changes are the most important things in the new constitution.”

— Chesterfield Smith
CRC Commission Members

- 37 Members
- Attorney General
- 15 appointed by Governor (appoints chair)
- 9 appointed by House Speaker
- 9 appointed by Senate President
- 3 appointed by Chief Justice, Supreme Court
Two Previous CRCs

1977-1978

- Chaired by Sandy D’Alemberte
- Eight proposals
- None adopted on ballot but some were implemented later
1978 Ballot Measures and Vote

- Omnibus proposal (56 changes)  29%
- Declaration of rights (mini-ERA)  43%
- Legislative Single-Member Districts and Reappointment Commission  47%
- Executive/cabinet restructuring  25%
- Executive Public Service Commission and Public Counsel  36%
- Judiciary: Merit selection of trial court judges  49%
- Finance and taxation  36%
- Education  36%
1997-98 Commission

– Chaired by Dexter Douglas
– Nine proposals placed on ballot
– Eight were successful
– Major marketing efforts to inform citizens
1998 Ballot Measures and Vote

- Conservation and creation of fish and wildlife conservation commission (72%)
- Public education (71%)
- Judicial selection and funding of state courts (57%)
- Restructuring state cabinet (56%)
- Basic rights (gender equality) 66%
- Local and Municipal tax exemption/citizen access to local officials (49.8%)
- Ballot access, public campaign financing and election process revisions (64%)
- Firearms Purchases (72%)
- Miscellaneous matters and technical revisions (55%)
Getting Ready for 2017
Partnership for Revising Florida’s Constitution

Educate and inform public of the importance of 2017-2018 CRC:

– Prior to naming of the commission to insure top-notch choices
– After commission is named to provide analysis of possible amendments
– Encourage citizens to participate and VOTE
Partners

Bob Graham Center-UF
Center for Govt Responsibility-UF
Community Foundation for NE FL
FL Association of Counties
FL Bar
FL Bar Foundation
FL Chamber Foundation
FL Justice Association
FL Law Related Education Assoc

FL League of Cities
FL Philanthropic Network
FL Press Association
FL TaxWatch
Justin Sayfie
Leadership Florida
League of Women Voters FL
NAACP-FL State Conference
Virgil Hawkins FL Chapter of Nat’l Bar Assoc
What Partners can Do:

– Sponsor event for local/regional leaders, media and the public on the upcoming CRC
  • Presenters—local officials serving on prior commissions; academics; group leaders
  • Highlight importance to the local area
  • Discuss possible constitutional amendments
– Write Op Ed pieces on the upcoming CRC and its meaning to the local community
– Encourage community groups to participate
Other Efforts

• Citizens’ Guide to Constitution Revision Commission (with FL Bar)
  – 120,000 copies
• Animation—I’m Not a Bill
• Kickoff in Tallahassee October 28, 2015
• Webpage, Facebook, Twitter
Funding

- Jessie Ball duPont—social media/marketing
- Florida Bar—Citizens’ Guide
- Bob Graham Center—polling questions (in-kind)
Why Now?
Three Phases

• Assuring top-notch commission members
• Presenting possible amendment to commission
• Informing voters and getting out the vote
Phase 1: Assuring Top-Notch Commission members

• Work with groups to highlight importance of the appointments
• Encourage groups to identify and recommend possible members
• Work with the media to highlight issue
What kind of person looking for?

• Forward-thinking
• Innovative
• Creative
• Cares about wellbeing of state
• Bipartisan or nonpartisan
• Represents diversity of state
Likely CRC Timetable

- Session 2016--appropriations for planning
- June 2016--Governor’s Constitutional Revision Steering Committee named (state officials) and Executive Director in Governor’s office
- February 2017--Commission named
- Session 2017--appropriations for Commission’s work
Phase 2

• What amendments should be considered by the CRC?
After Commission is Named

• Two sets of hearings
  – Garnering ideas from public
  – Getting feedback on proposals adopted by the Commission

• Participate in hearings/submit position papers and proposals

• Use webpage for linkages to groups

• No partnership recommendations
Citizens can...

• Follow deliberations of Commission
• Attend hearings
• Communicate with Commission members
• Use the media to discuss ideas
Possible Commission Topics

- Term limits
- Judicial nominations
- Higher education funding
- K-12 education funding
- Statutory initiative process
- Independent Redistricting Commission
Who can submit ideas?

• Individuals
• Organizations and groups
• Students/teachers
• PRETTY MUCH ANYONE!
Phase 3

• Amendments approved by the Commission go directly to the ballot
• Need 60 percent vote
• Important to inform citizens about their choices
• November 2018
“Every generation of citizens has a right to choose for itself the form of government it believes most promotive of its own happiness.”

– Thomas Jefferson
“We are dealing with a constitutional democracy in which sovereignty resides in the people. It is their constitution...They have a right to change, abrogate or modify it in any manner they see fit...”

– Glenn Terrell, former FL Supreme Court Justice
Too Important to Miss

• This is the citizens’ opportunity to make a difference
  – Members of the Commission
  – Possible Amendments
  – Informed voting
Hope you agree and will work with us.

Dr. Carol Weissert, cweissert@fsu.edu
http://www.revisefl.com/