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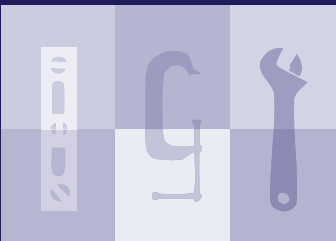
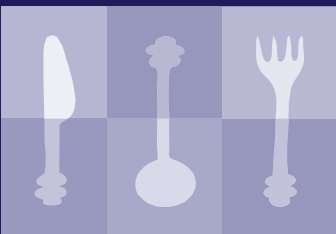
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January 29 Election—Critical for Educators

By Gay Parker, SEA President

January is a very critical month for educators all over the state. On January 29 Floridians will be voting on Florida's Proposed Property Tax Amendment. Seminole County property appraiser, David Johnson, estimated a 6.4 million dollar revenue loss for the SCPS 2008-09 school year if the Amendment passes. State estimated losses have been calculated at 11.3 million, 16.3 million, 21.8 million and 27.4 million dollars for the succeeding years. Most of the dollar losses each year will affect the school board's operating budget. This is the part of the budget that funds almost everything connected to the classroom and students. And this is only the beginning of budget losses for the School Board for a long time — if the Amendment passes!

Homeowners will see a savings of only about \$20 a month in property taxes. The savings is very small, but the impact to education is significant, making the passage of this Amendment a very high price for residents to pay for such a small benefit. To make matters worse, the Property Tax Amendment will impact our safety with similar cuts to fire and police departments and other service groups. According to one publication, "Amendment 1 gives part-time residents and mansion owners the overwhelming bulk of the tax cut, while families who live and work in Florida will see very little in the way of tax savings." Because the State is proposing a tax cut, local governments are raising fees to compensate as a result. Many homeowners may actually see a net increase in the taxes they pay as a result.

Reforming our property taxes in Florida is an excellent idea, but this Amendment is not the right way to do it. We do not need another band-aid approach to a systemic problem. As one FEA member says, "Taxpayers should hold lawmakers accountable for giving the state's richest residents millions of dollars in tax breaks (sale of yachts, stadium skyboxes, etc.) while urging voters to take \$3 billion from our school children." The well being of a community starts with an excellent school system, a school system that must be funded appropriately.

FEA has sent you several applications to vote by mail for your convenience. Please fill yours out if your preference is to vote by mail and encourage your family, friends, and colleagues to do the same. Voting in primary or special elections is traditionally very low. This means that if all educators vote, we have a very good opportunity to prevent a major funding loss to education. If we don't do our part, we cannot complain. **PLEASE VOTE NO** on the Property Tax Amendment.

Experts project that the amendment could cost public schools \$204 million next year and \$2.76 billion over the next five years.

State economists say that this economic downturn is unprecedented. Florida has not experienced back-to-back annual revenue declines since the Revenue Estimating Conference began tracking the economy in 1971.

"Defeat of the amendment would be good for Florida, because it would increase the chances for real tax reform. There are many reasons to dislike the amendment. Chief among them is that the proposal would help most those taxpayers who need help the least, and would cost Florida's public school system about \$3 billion over five years."

--Palm Beach Post editorial

"The 'easy' cuts have already been made; the next round and the round after that will surely be devastating for public education, social services, corrections, and health care. What's it going to take to prod Crist and the Legislature into facing the root cause of Florida's fiscal problems; an antiquated sales tax system that is riddled with so many special interest loopholes that it unfairly taxes some while giving others a free ride?"

-- Gainesville Sun editorial

On The Road...Join NIPSCO!



NIPSCO has kicked off the annual Winter Membership Drive with the theme, “On the Road to... NIPSCO!” We are hoping that you take the high road and encourage someone to join NIPSCO! Each of your board members will receive a driver’s manual (membership recruitment packet).

Anyone who has not joined yet is a potential member. As a member of your professional organization, you too, are encouraged to be a membership recruiter. It’s easy: just ask someone to join. If they do, you will be on your way to hitting the highway!

What? How? You may ask: For every member that you sign up, you will receive a \$10 dollar gas card.

Aren’t you glad you’re a member? Don’t you wish all employees were? Set someone else in the right direction to gain the benefits, the protection, and the great sense of unity that you have: ask a potential member to join NIPSCO.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

On Monday, January 21, ALL school board employees will have a *paid* holiday. This holiday celebrates Dr. King’s birthday. Making Dr. King’s birthday a holiday was first introduced by Michigan Congressman John Conyers just four days after Dr. King’s death in 1968. After being stalled for a number of years, petitions with 6,000,000 signatures were submitted to Congress. There was a compromise to set the holiday for the 3rd Monday in January, rather than January 15, Dr. King’s actual birthday, and this helped to overcome some opposition because it was not so close to Christmas and New Year’s Day. The first state to adopt this as a state holiday, in 1973, was Illinois. Arizona was the last. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day became a Federal holiday in 1986. In 1993, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was held in some form – sometimes with a different name, and not always a paid holiday – in all 50 states.

Enjoy your holiday and remember that nonviolence is not passive, but requires courage.



Does Leap Year Mean I'm Working 259 Days This Year?

NO. There are 105 weekend days in the 2007-08 employee calendar, which is July 1 to June 30th. As a result, no twelve month employee is working more than 258 days. Last year there were 104 weekend days in the employee calendar and, as contracted, all employees worked 258 days.

Way to Go!

Congratulations to Craig Hopes, NIPSCO President. Craig has been chosen by FEA to represent Florida at the National ESP Conference to be held in Baltimore, MD in March.