



I WANT YOU!

The Family Café CHANGE AGENT NETWORK THEY NEED YOU!

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This Newsletter Is A Project Of The Family Café

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The Change Agent Network is a project of The Family Café and offers an opportunity for advocates and change agents to work collaboratively to transform the system by: combining abilities, skills, ideas, and talents; standing together for meaningful system reform measures; taking the lead in our communities and neighborhoods; sharing information to help families become effective players within their communities; developing statewide networks to organize and discuss the issues that are most important to families and persons with disabilities; and creating a united position on critical disability policy issues.

There are over 3.5 Million individuals with disabilities in Florida...

THEY NEED YOU!



With the 2018 legislative session recently completed, we begin the process of preparing for the 2019 session. Before we can do that, however, it's important we all roll up our sleeves and participate in this critical upcoming election cycle.

This will be one of the busiest, most contested and important midterm elections in recent history.

Every seat in the Florida House of Representatives is on the ballot, as required by the Constitution. However, many incumbents normally do not face a challenger, and many more races, based on demographics, are not winnable by the opposing party. However, this election will be historic due to the high number of "open seats" as well as many incumbents facing highly credible opponents. So much so that it's estimated that almost a quarter of the 2019 Florida House will be "freshman," or brand new to elected office. In the Florida Senate, there are several open seats, not to mention the handful of incumbents who will face challengers for the first time in their careers. It is expected generally that the Democrats will make gains this midterm cycle and that Florida, as usual, will be a key battleground state. Specifically, in the Florida Senate, it is possible that the balance of power could be impacted, something that hasn't happened in nearly 20 years. Regardless of who becomes Senate President in January, it is likely that the Democrats will close the gap to within a couple of seats. This will have a big impact in how the Senate negotiates policy measures with a much more conservative Florida House of Representatives.



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As we all know, in the Governor’s race we see large primaries on both sides. It is truly anyone’s guess as to either of the “front runners.” Republicans and Democrats see challengers from the progressive, centrist and conservative factions within their respective parties. The result of these primaries will have long-range implications for the futures of both parties.

All of the other Florida Cabinet offices: Attorney General, Agriculture Commissioner, and Chief Financial Officer, are also up for grabs. We will have a brand new Agriculture Commissioner, a new Attorney General, and a new Chief Financial Officer. The current CFO, Jimmy Patronis, was appointed by Governor Scott and will face his first election to that post.

It is also worth mentioning that with the completion of the Constitutional Revision Commission’s work there will be 8 constitutional amendments on the ballot. It is extremely important that we collectively pay attention to these, as they are amendments to our State’s Constitution. The areas addressed in these amendments represent a broad range of public policy issues that will have a direct impact on our lives. It’s important to take the time to understand what they intend to do. Based on their size, and the fact that there are multiple issues included in most, it will take real effort to understand the ramifications of each one. It’s important that we do not let special interest groups frame the debate on these issues. Don’t forget, in order to amend the Florida Constitution, it must pass with a supermajority, which is 60% of the general election vote. Most agree that whether you support or oppose an amendment, that bar should be high, because amending the Constitution is serious business. There will also be several amendments to the constitution outside of the CRC process that have been placed there by the legislature and citizen initiatives.

So let’s work hard, pay attention, and most importantly GET INVOLVED this election cycle! In short, there will be many new faces at the outset of the 2019 legislative session regardless of who wins.

2019 Session Dates

Session is only 60 days!!

March 5, 2019 Regular Session convenes 12:00 noon, deadline for filing bills for introduction.

April 20, 2019 All bills are immediately certified. Motion to reconsider made and considered the same day.

April 23, 2019 50th day – last day for regularly scheduled committee meetings.

May 3, 2019 60th day – last day of Regular Session.

The Legislative Process in Plain English

Advocating in the legislature can feel like going to court without a lawyer. The 60 day legislative session can be fast and furious, interspersed with so many deadlines and rules that it can be intimidating. These rules can often be used as “excuses” as to why a good thing can’t happen, or why certain requests can’t be entertained. Thousands of bills are filed and only a relatively few will pass. Here are some important things to remember:

- Bills are drafted and then filed by Representatives or Senators. They will be assigned to Committees by the Speaker's Office (in the House of Representatives) or the Senate President (in the Senate).
- Once bills are "referred" to Committee they must have a hearing in those committees. Both bodies will generally refer bills to at least three or four committees.
- Most bills will die because they do not get through all their committee references. Bills will often pass all of their committee stops in one body but not both. This bill is dead.
- Once bills complete all committee stops they are placed on the House or Senate Calendar.
- There are two stops for floor hearings in the House and Senate. First is the "Special Order" Calendar, where bills are brought up, amended if necessary, and questions are asked. After the sponsor has explained the bill and all questions are asked and answered, a bill is "rolled over" to "third reading."
- The following day a "third reading" calendar will be posted. This is where bills are debated and ultimately voted on. Once a bill is voted out of the Senate it is sent to the House and is placed in "messages."
- An identical bill will have to pass both the House and Senate for final passage to the Governor. This means that even if they are identical (which they must eventually be) the Senate will take up the House Bill in lieu of the Senate bill. or vice versa.
- One of the most common ways bills die is that the House and Senate cannot agree on language in a bill. Bills often contain various provisions and any different language in any part of the bill will render it out of order.

Frank Truths in the Legislative Process

Know the Legislative Aides: Legislative aides (LA) will more often than not be the ones to deliver the majority of information and messages to their Member. Most will even review their email accounts. One cannot "get around" a member's legislative aide regardless of how incompetent or unresponsive they are. Keep in mind that these folks are overworked, underpaid, and often underappreciated. A legislator's aide can be our most valuable advocate at the most important time. It doesn't matter how well you know a legislator if they don't realize that something they are voting on is important to you. In this 60 day environment, information and issues come at legislators at lightning fast speed. It is the aide's job to make sure their boss doesn't do anything that will hurt them back home. Spend time with the legislative aides. "Tag" them to be your eyes and ears during the chaos of session. In some instances this is as important as knowing your legislator.

Meet with your local elected officials at home BEFORE the legislative session: There are few things more effective than meeting with your legislators to introduce yourself and give an overview of your issue before making an "ask" during session. Making issues personal for elected officials makes a big difference. The understanding that they will have to face you after voting on your issue can make all the difference in the world. There are many moving parts that result in decisions made on issues. Knowing a real person from back home with a personal story can be a critical one. Individuals asks of legislators during sessions happen dozens (maybe hundreds) of times a day. Having the ability to say "remember when we talked about this?" can make a difference.

It's never personal, so never burn the bridge: Continuing the “many moving parts” theme, there are many reasons why legislators vote the way they do. Not all votes are as bad as they seem after the fact. Never assume that because someone “voted the wrong way” that they are less honorable. There are different perspectives in this process and difficult decisions to make. Today's foe is very often tomorrow's champion. Sometimes when an issue passes or fails it can feel like the end of the world, and while not all legislative battles are created equal, this is rarely the case. As difficult as it may be, if for nothing other than the ability to constructively work with that member again, never let it become personal. Displeasure can be made clear during the election season and at the ballot box.

Every County has a “delegation”: Every county in Florida has a delegation of their House Member(s) and Senator (s). In some counties it consists of two people; in Dade County there are over twenty! This group meets in an official capacity throughout the year, elects a delegation chair, decides on “local bills,” and in some cases creates a list of priorities to be accomplished during session for their county. The public can speak at these meetings, and doing so is a way to speak with multiple members at once in a setting outside of the chaos of session.

A Few More Tips for Successful Advocacy

- There is no more effective advocate than a well-informed constituent. None. Personalize your communication.
- Tell your story. Putting a face or personal anecdote on an issue will mean all the difference in the world.
- It's often a question of timing. On any given day a legislator will face dozens of important issues. With limited time before committee hearings, a good aide will make sure the boss sees the most important items.
- People with the identical amount of integrity can come to opposite positions on an issue. Never forget that.
- Don't ever take a “no” personally. This experience will prove helpful in future contacts, even if your legislator can't help on this particular occasion.
- Make an appointment in advance. Usually ask for 30 minutes but don't be offended if you only get 15.
- Timing is everything. Visits prior to a vote by the committee in which your bill will be heard are particularly effective. Visits prior to a vote by either the full Senate or House are also helpful.
- Session is a moving target. Issues come fast and furious, and if you are looking at an “alert” or a newspaper story from a week ago, it is highly likely that the issue has changed or evolved completely.
- Tell the truth, even if it weakens your argument.
- Legislators are like Emergency Room doctors. They have heard it all.
- Organize your visit if you are seeing a legislator with multiple issues. Time will be limited. Decide in advance of the visit who will say what, and don't repeat the same points.
- Develop a relationship. The information you know about these issues is legitimately helpful to legislators. Go back and visit and say thank you. Make it a point to schedule a visit to say thank you if appropriate.
- Write a thank you note.
- Make yourself familiar with the following websites: Myflorida.com <http://www.myflorida.com/> and Myflorida-house.com <http://www.myfloridahouse.com/> will help you to monitor bills and look up committee agendas during session; Sayfiereview.com <http://www.sayfiereview.com/> is an excellent source of news and blogs that monitors the legislative session. It is what most legislators and lobbyists will review first thing in the morning!

One final thought: During this campaign season, don't be afraid to ask the candidates to sit down for a meeting! An ideal way to do this is to organize a small coffee as a “meet and greet.” A small sit down with a handful of like-minded people or your neighbors from the legislator's district can be very effective. Tell him or her your perspective. Some meetings may go better than others, but at least you'll know! Candidates are looking for our support, and the opportunity to interact with a group of voters is almost never a waste of any campaign's time.