

LEGISLATURE

Resignations, Death Create Vacant Seats in Legislature During Session

by Jim Turner

More than 1.1 million Florida voters won't have a representative in one of the legislative chambers when the 2018 session begins next month.

Resignations and a recent death have created six open seats, with most expected to remain vacant through the 60-day session because of scheduling requirements for special elections.

The vacancies do little to alter the Republican hold on both chambers, with the GOP up 23-15 in the Senate and 76-40 in the House entering the 2018 session.

But a vacancy can mean additional work for other lawmakers.

More importantly, Aubrey Jewett, a political science professor at the University of Central Florida, said people in districts short of full representation could struggle to see local needs and funding advanced.

"Some districts have certain issues that are important which may not be pursued at all or pursued with the same vigor," Jewett said. "Every district may have specific issues or projects that they would like funded. In the absence of representation, it is likely they will not get their share of the appropriations pie."

"The system is set up so that most members primarily listen to and try to help their own constituents. Under normal circumstances it is considered bad form to work with a constituent who does not live in your district," Jewett added. "Some years ago, when I was in college, I interned with my state representative. One of the first things that I was taught when being contacted by someone was to get their address and find out if they lived in the district or not. If they did not, I was directed to steer them toward their appropriate elected official."

However, he noted that district staff members usually remain in place until new lawmakers are seated, which helps with some constituent services.

Jewett also said a lawmaker leaving unexpectedly could affect bills that the lawmaker sponsored or planned to champion.

"If no other member has the passion for one of these issues, then it is likely that the policies will not have an advocate and will have a harder time becoming law or being funded," Jewett said.

As an example, former Rep. Alex Miller, a Sarasota Republican, resigned in August, pointing to family and work obligations as well as House leadership issues. She had earlier announced plans to pursue new state wildlife laws after videos surfaced of people abusing sharks. Since Miller's departure, no one has picked up issue.

As another example, Rep. Don Hahnfeldt, a Republican from The Villages who recently died of cancer, backed five local projects, including proposals that would provide money to Lake-Sumter State College and make improvements to County Road 466A, which runs through The Villages.

Having co-sponsors could help keep proposals moving after the departure of lawmakers.

Hahnfeldt, for instance, was sponsoring a bill (HB 1029) that calls for raising the legal age for smoking from 18 to 21. Rep. Lori Berman, a Lantana Democrat who is co-sponsoring the bill, intends to move forward with the proposal.



Florida Democratic Party leaders called for quicker special elections in two legislative districts so the seats of former Sen. Jeff Clemens, above, and former Rep. Daisy Baez could be filled for at least part of the legislative session. A Leon County circuit judge rejected their request.

"I was honored to have worked with him on raising the tobacco purchase age to 21 and will pursue this important issue in his legacy," Berman tweeted on Tuesday. Sen. David Simmons, R-Altamonte Springs, also is sponsoring a Senate version of the bill.

Susan MacManus, a political science professor at the University of South Florida, said the vacancies highlight the importance of coalition building.

"It is never optimal in a representative democracy for vacancies during a legislative session," MacManus said in an email. "But constituents missing a representative or senator have little choice other than to turn to others who share[d] his, her interests whether via a political party or committee assignment or interest group."

With legislative seats vacant for months after the exits of lawmakers, MacManus said it is important for voters to understand the necessity of special-election timelines. That includes providing time for overseas voters to receive and cast ballots.

"Too many voters see this as an intentional delay rather than as mandated protection of overseas voters' right to vote," MacManus said.

Leon County Circuit Judge Charles Dodson this month rejected arguments by Florida Democratic Party leaders that special elections in two legislative districts should be held more quickly so the seats could be filled for at least part of the legislative session.

Dodson described as "unfortunate" the timing of the resignations of former Sen. Jeff Clemens in Palm Beach County's Senate District 31 and former Rep. Daisy Baez in Miami-Dade County's House District 114. But he said moving up special-election dates set by Gov. Rick Scott could lead to an argument that shorter windows for absentee voting would prevent people from casting ballots.

"I wish I could do something," Dodson said as he ruled against the party's request. "But there really isn't time to do it."

State law requires 45 days for absentee voting before special and general elections. The party argued the requirement shouldn't apply to special elections.

Jim Turner reports for the News Service of Florida.



CITY OF DORAL NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

All residents, property owners and other interested parties are hereby notified of a **Local Planning Agency (LPA)** meeting on **Wednesday, January 17, 2018 beginning at 5:00 PM**, to consider the establishment of a one-year moratorium on Medical Marijuana Treatment Center in the City of Doral. This meeting will be held at the **City of Doral, Government Center, Council Chambers located at 8401 NW 53rd Terrace, Doral, Florida 33166.**

The City of Doral proposes to adopt the following Resolution:

RESOLUTION No. 18-

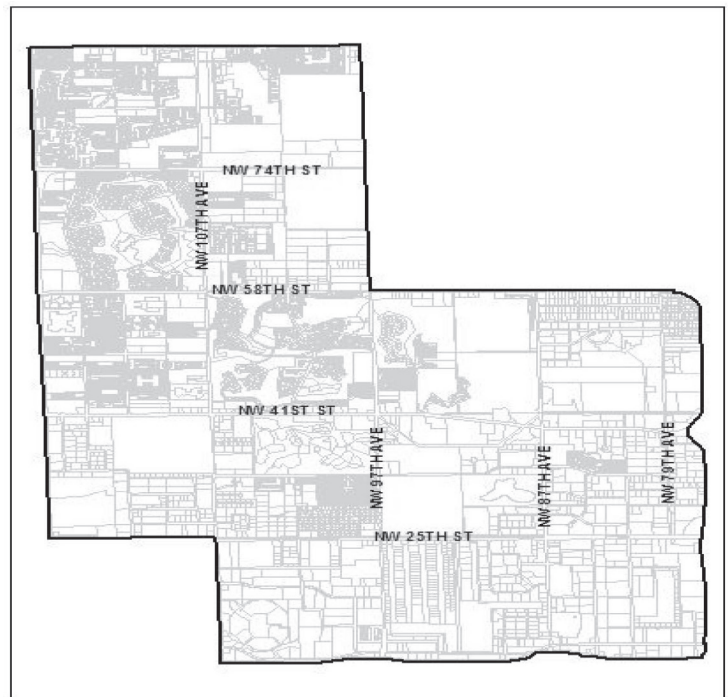
A RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF DORAL, FLORIDA, SITTING AS THE LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY RECOMMENDING APPROVAL / DENIAL OF, OR TRANSMITTING WITHOUT A RECOMMENDATION, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MORATORIUM FOR A PERIOD OF ONE- YEAR FROM THE EFFECTIVE DATE OF THIS ORDINANCE ON THE ACCEPTANCE, REVIEW, APPROVAL OR ISSUANCE OF ANY LAND DEVELOPMENT PERMITS AS THE TERM IS DEFINED IN FLORIDA STATUTES SECTION 163.3164(16), BUSINESS TAX RECEIPTS OR ANY OTHER LICENSE OR PERMIT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OR OPERATION OF A MEDICAL MARIJUANA TREATMENT CENTER WITHIN ALL ZONING DISTRICTS IN THE CITY OF DORAL; IN ORDER TO PROVIDE THE CITY WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW THE REGULATIONS ADOPTED BY THE STATE OF FLORIDA GOVERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF A MEDICAL MARIJUANA TREATMENT CENTER; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE

HEARING NO.: 18-01-DOR-01

APPLICANT: City of Doral

REQUEST: The City of Doral (The "Applicant") is requesting LPA approval to establish a one-year moratorium on Medical Marijuana Treatment Center in the City of Doral.

Map



Information relating to this request is on file and may be examined in the City of Doral, Planning and Zoning Department located at **8401 NW 53rd Terrace, Doral, FL 33166**. All persons are invited to appear at this meeting or be represented by an agent, or to express their views in writing addressed to the City Clerk, **8401 NW 53rd Terrace, Doral, FL 33166**. Maps and other data pertaining to these applications are available for public inspection during normal business hours in City Hall. Any persons wishing to speak at a public hearing should register with the City Clerk prior to that item being heard. Inquiries regarding the item may be directed to the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL.

Pursuant to Section 286.0105, Florida Statutes If a person decides to appeal any decisions made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. This notice does not constitute consent by the City for introduction or admission of otherwise inadmissible or irrelevant evidence, nor does it authorize challenges or appeals not otherwise allowed by law. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, all persons who are disabled and who need special accommodations to participate in this meeting because of that disability should contact the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL no later than three (3) business days prior to the proceeding.

NOTE: If you are not able to communicate, or are not comfortable expressing yourself, in the English language, it is your responsibility to bring with you an English-speaking interpreter when conducting business at the City of Doral during the zoning application process up to, and including, appearance at a hearing. This person may be a friend, relative or someone else. A minor cannot serve as a valid interpreter. The City of Doral DOES NOT provide translation services during the zoning application process or during any quasi-judicial proceeding.

NOTA: Si usted no está en capacidad de comunicarse, o no se siente cómodo al expresarse en inglés, es de su responsabilidad traer un intérprete del idioma inglés cuando trate asuntos públicos o de negocios con la Ciudad de Doral durante el proceso de solicitudes de zonificación, incluyendo su comparecencia a una audiencia. Esta persona puede ser un amigo, familiar o alguien que le haga la traducción durante su comparecencia a la audiencia. Un menor de edad no puede ser intérprete. La Ciudad de Doral NO suministra servicio de traducción durante ningún procedimiento o durante el proceso de solicitudes de zonificación.

Connie Diaz, CMC

City Clerk

City of Doral

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