



Monday, July 19, 2004



Florida Chamber Chair Fred Leonhardt Delivers VoteSmartFlorida.org's Campaign Messages to Hundreds Attending FBT Leadership Retreat in Orlando

Just as Florida Chamber Chair Fred Leonhardt joined the all-star lineup of speakers for the 2004 Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT) Leadership Retreat, the Florida Supreme Court was removing two proposed constitutional amendments from the November ballot. During the FBT Retreat at the Renaissance Orlando Resort at

SeaWorld, July 15 and 16, Leonhardt had the opportunity to address a crowd of more than 150 attendees and deliver the messages of the VoteSmartFlorida.org campaign.

Leonhardt shared a lot of information with retreat attendees on the campaign's efforts to reform Florida's flawed ballot initiative process, reminding them to walk away with one fact: Florida has the easiest constitution in the United States to amend – even easier than California's.

He shared a few facts about Florida's constitution with his audience. These included: Florida's constitution is five times longer than the U.S. Constitution and its constitution has been amended 95 times in 34 years. Leonhardt also discussed the consequences of an out-of-control constitutional amendment process, pointing out that if amendments continue at their current rate, the result is increased taxes and money cut from existing state programs. He indicated that money may possibly be diverted away from critical needs, such as transportation.

Finally, Leonhardt reminded attendees that November ballot amendment number 2, the "No Surprises" provision, was created and passed this legislative session due to the tremendous efforts of the VoteSmartFlorida.org alliance. He asked attendees to vote "yes" on amendment 2 this November.

Currently, signatures gathered through the citizen initiative process are due only 91 days prior to the election, leaving little time for education and discussion surrounding proposed amendments. The "No Surprises" provision changes the signature deadline from 91 days to February 1 of the election year and requires the Supreme Court to review it by April 1. In addition, this fall the first financial impact statements that will accompany each amendment proposed by citizen initiative were released. While this is a good start in the right direction, these financial impact statements only take into account the cost the amendment will have on government. It does not take into account the cost the amendments will have for residents or businesses.

Leonhardt captivated attendees with illustrations of ads for signature gatherers, information these signature-gathering companies are sharing with potential hires, and fraudulent petitions. He closed by challenging meeting attendees to become more involved by distributing information to employees (E2e), participating in speakers' bureaus, meeting with or calling legislators, contributing financially, hosting VoteSmartFlorida.org meetings, and remembering to Vote Smart! this November.