

## Lawmaking at its 'worst'

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After 12 years of being involved with growth management issues in Florida, I think this legislative session has got to be the worst.

Elected officials are focused on winning their issue at any cost. They seem to think the people are the enemy.

From the very beginning it was obvious they would use all tricks of the trade to keep the special-interest money machine fed.

Over 65 "shell" bills were filed in the Senate relating to growth management and local governments. These place-holder bills simply state a legislative intent to change something. Many of these shell bills have come alive with language week by week.

You can't conduct thoughtful, democratic dialogue on an issue when you don't know what the bill says until it is being heard in a committee.

The House played a different game. House members only filed nine growth bills at the beginning of session. The real work was hidden behind committees.

Starting the second week of session, huge water bills came alive in House committees. I consider only one to be actually good regarding our drinking water.

There is a new tactic this year for hiding things in bills. It is to reorganize statutes into new sections, then state that none of the language has changed. House Bill 1109 on water supply is an example. The danger of this bill is what you don't see.

Only part of the legislative intent from the original statute was kept, which would have changed the entire focus of supplying water in this state. Water authorities that want to create new water supplies wouldn't have to worry about those pesky environmental or health and safety concerns of the public.

Then we have the big economic stimulus bill, Senate Bill 1752. It included language very harmful to the environment and water permitting (more than 80 pages) that was heard in one committee and then went straight to the floor for a vote. The environmentally harmful sections of the bill were stripped away, but no one yet has said where the \$100 million up-front money will come from to spur the economy.

After this came Senate Bill 6, which would have changed how teachers are evaluated. Talk about ramming something through the system. It was so bad Gov. Charlie Crist had to veto it.

In addition, the usual standby tactic of replacing the language of a bill with a "strike-all" amendment that no one has seen prior to a committee meeting is alive and well.

House Bill 7177 started in committee as a six-page water conservation bill and ended as a 22-page rewrite of many water issues, including wetland-mitigation banks and consumptive-use permits. This committee is the only group that has seen the bill, which is now going to the House floor for a vote.

More recently came a direct display of contempt for the public. Senate Bill 2288 recently was heard by the reapportionment committee in the Senate. Remember, this is the bill that would counteract the two ballot initiatives by Fair Districts Florida. Group after group filed opposition cards to this bill but waived their time speaking.

Many of the committee members demanded opponents come to the podium, where lawmakers chastised them for their opinion. Here were some comments from committee members:

"We know more about this; we are the experts." "How dare you object without talking to us."

Only one group supported this "clarifying" bill - Associated Industries of Florida. Need I say more?

The legislators get away with this behavior because we let them. Please, pay attention to how they act and vote on this session's nasty bills and vote them out of office. We, the people, have to change this unreality show.