

## Parker on Politics: Bill affects land say-so

By: Betty Parker – April 26, 2013

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Lee County officials and environmental proponents were startled to learn recently a bill moving through the Legislature affects Lee County's say-so in managing the Bob Janes Preserve, a 5,600-acre parcel Lee County bought in 2006 as part of the larger Babcock Ranch preserve.

Legislation setting up the project allowed Lee to appoint members on the land management board. But that bill expires soon, and the re-creation was wrapped into a long bill on almost every aspect of the Department of Agriculture, from bee-keeping to horse racing to consumer matters.

But it no longer allowed Lee County to name a board member; they would instead be appointed by Ag Commissioner Adam Putnam, who's recently downplayed speculation that he might run for governor.

The county has no problem with Putnam but still wants input on the land it bought, intended for public use such as hiking, biking or horseback riding.

"It's almost the end of session, and this is tucked inside the agency's big omnibus bill, which is moving very fast," said Commissioner Frank Mann, a former legislator. "Some people here got a little worried."

They sent a letter to Putnam, and Mann flew to Tallahassee for a day to meet with lawmakers. Putnam was extremely responsive to the county's concerns, he said, and called Mann to assure him there was no hidden agenda.

The bill sailed through committees and is now poised for floor action, but Mann said he's been promised by Lee County senators and Rep. Matt Caldwell, R-Lehigh Acres, who chairs the House's ag subcommittee, they will amend it on the floor so Lee can still appoint members.

"We just want to continue to have a voice on this," Mann said. "It caught us by surprise in this big bill, which just exploded out of nowhere and moved so fast, but our legislators promised me they'll take care of making the needed changes."

### Budget

The question of why lawmakers wait until the last minute to settle the budget is an annual debate. It's largely about the nature of negotiation, regardless of the venue. Much legislation is the result of compromise and trade-offs that can go on until session adjournment forces settlement.

Watch what happens with the ethics and campaign finance bills that went to Gov. Rick Scott this week. He threatens to hold them hostage in exchange for the sales tax exemption he wants on manufacturing equipment—a change with an expected cost to the state of about \$140 million.

One key element of the campaign finance bill could have affected every voter with a mailbox, regardless of whether they donated to a candidate.

Remember all the attack mailings that arrived daily before last fall's primary, most from groups with names like "Americans for Honest Government"? Such groups are most often "committees of continuous existence", or CCEs, used for campaign purposes. Most of their claims ranged from distortions to flat untruths, but figuring out who was really behind them was almost impossible before the election.

Early bills banned CCEs in exchange for allowing larger donations directly to candidates. And some lawmakers touted the fact that the final bills eliminated the CCEs and all their related problems.

But the bills still allow creation of other groups, called political committees, that can still do essentially the same things CCEs did. They do, however, have to file more timely reports about their financial backers' identities.

Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann said he hopes Scott vetoes the bill. "The amount of money it takes to run a successful campaign now is obscene, and the CCEs were the most obscene part of the whole thing," Mann said. "Now it looks like the bill allows bigger donations, and enables more groups who continue doing what CCEs did under another name."

#### Gun control

Robert Levy, board chairman of the Cato Institute — a Washington, D.C., think tank that takes a libertarian approach to issues — talked about the constitutional issues and decisions involved in increased gun control in a speech this week at BusinessPeople United Political Action Committee or BUPAC.

Given CATO's preference for individual liberty, it's a virtual given they don't favor most recent proposals.

But Levy, a Naples resident, surprised the group more with his ideas about what should be done if people were serious about reducing gun violence.

Mass shootings are a statistically minute part of gun deaths, he said; far more deaths are one-on-one or gang shootings. "The most effective weapon to curb gun violence would be to legalize drugs," he said. "We are overrun with drug violence."

Gangs, and terrorists, make millions of dollars every year in illegal drug sales; legalization could remove some of that financial incentive, as well as the need to solve drug-related disputes with more crime, he said.

Short of that, Levy said, he supports armed guards, with better and more intense training, in schools, and also allowing teachers and principals to have access to weapons.