

**Class-size measure defeated**

The Boston Globe

**Fla. governor unable to rally GOP support**

By Cynthia L. Webb, Globe Correspondent | May 6, 2005

NICEVILLE, Fla. -- Governor Jeb Bush's controversial effort to change a state constitutional amendment on class-size limits was soundly defeated by the state Senate yesterday, denting his record of pushing through wide-sweeping education mandates in Florida since taking office seven years ago.

ADVERTISEMENT The measure was rejected, 19 to 21. To pass, it needed a three-fifths majority, or 24 votes. Seven Republicans joined 14 Democrats in voting it down, a further defeat for Bush, because the Republican governor could not rally enough support from his party.

The vote effectively dashes Bush's hopes of scaling-back the class-size amendment, which voters passed in 2002. Today is the last day of the legislative session. While Bush could call a special session or take up the issue next year, it was unlikely.

"The issue is dead," said Senator Dennis L. Jones of Seminole, a Republican who voted against Bush's resolution. "I don't know why you would want to bring an issue back that you can't even win a simple majority on. I would hope this sends a strong message to the governor's office that he needs to look in the mirror and revisit his priorities."

The action provides a boost for supporters of voter initiatives.

The action is "a huge victory for the people of Florida who voted for this amendment in 2002," said Damien Filer, spokesman for the group that sponsored the original amendment.

Bush, President Bush's brother, opposed the amendment before voters passed it in 2002. Saying it would be a budget buster, he estimated the class-size plan would cost \$27 billion to carry out by 2010. So far, the state has spent \$2.1 billion instituting it.

Other states have watched Florida, particularly on education issues, including overhauls on class size. Supporters say smaller classes, particularly for kindergarten through third grade, can lead to better academic performance, but instituting class-size limits is often difficult with overcrowding, limited funding, and teacher shortages.

Bush spokesman Jacob DiPietre did not immediately return a call for comment yesterday.

Senator Evelyn J. Lynn, Republican of Ormond Beach, who is a Senate sponsor of Bush's effort to change the class-size mandate, said the issue would probably not be revisited. "It's very unfortunate that we lost the vote. The people of this state should have been able to voice their opinion."

Opponents said voters have spoken on the issue. "The process of the ballot initiative was created so that the people could have a voice, a voice that could eventually supersede the voice of their elected representatives," said John H. Jackson, national director of education for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which opposed Bush's class-size shift. "It speaks volumes that the people of Florida wanted to have the class-size limit in the constitution."

The governor is not new to seeking repeal of constitutional amendments. In early 2004, Bush backed an effort to repeal a 2000 Florida amendment that required the construction of a high-speed rail system. Voters approved the repeal in November 2004. It is not just a Florida trend: In 2003, the Massachusetts Legislature repealed the state's Clean Elections Law, despite voters' overwhelming approval of it in 1998.

T. Wayne Bailey, professor of political science at Stetson University, said the class-size issue is not something that many lawmakers will want to touch for the November 2006 election.

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