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| Press Contacts:  Travis Hart  Supervisor of Elections  Lafayette County |  |

**2013 Legislative Session Ends with Passage of New Election Laws**

*Changes Will Impact 2014 Elections*

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Tallahassee, FL – Although last November was not quite the nightmare scenario experienced in the 2000 election, Florida still bore the brunt of national scrutiny as many stood in long lines during early voting and on election day. This, coupled with Florida not reporting results until two days after the election, prompted legislators to make election law reform a top priority of the 2013 Legislative Session. However, even with the sense of urgency, the final product, House Bill 7013, didn’t pass until just before the traditional dropping of the handkerchiefs, which marks the end of the legislative session.

Legislators concluded the long lines last November were a result of laws passed in 2011 reducing the number of early voting days from 14 to 8. Having realized the problem, the debate quickly focused on increasing the number of days in order to avoid a similar situation in the future. This led to the provision in HB 7013 which mandates Supervisors of Elections provide at least 8 days of early voting while allowing them the flexibility to increase that number to 14.

“Lafayette County didn’t experience the long lines like, for instance, Miami-Dade did last election. HB 7013 recognizes Florida is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ when it comes to elections. Allowing individual Supervisors of Elections the discretion to decide the number of voting days will hopefully save tax payers money and improve the voting experience throughout the state,” said Lafayette County Supervisor of Elections Travis Hart.

Another culprit blamed for the long lines was the length of amendments included on the ballot last election. All amendments last November were placed on the ballot by the legislature, which does not have to comply with the same 75-word limit ballot summary citizens who collect initiative petitions do. However, HB 7013 contains a provision placing the same word limits on the Legislature which should reduce the time it takes an individual to vote, thus quickening the voting process during an election.

Other improvements found in HB 7013 involve the absentee voting process. Voters who forget to sign the back of an absentee envelope will now have until 5pm on the day before an election to “cure”, or fix, the problem and have their vote counted. The bill also adds security to the absentee process by having voters submit signed requests if the ballot is being delivered to an address other than the voter’s home, with the exception of overseas and military voters. It also prohibits political organizations from collecting more than two absentee ballots from non-family members.

Through the collaborative efforts of the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections (FSASE) and the Florida Legislature, HB 7013 overwhelmingly passed the Senate and the House and is now on its way to Gov. Rick Scott.

“A phrase often used in the Legislature is, ‘Don’t let the perfect get in the way of the possible’. That is true of this bill as there is still work to do,” stated Hart. “However, I am proud to have been part of the FSASE team which worked hard and diligently to improve the voting process for all Floridians.”

House Bill 7013, upon the signature of the Governor, will take effect January 1, 2014.