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OPINION: CONSTITUTIONAL HOME RULE – WE GOT THIS!

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TB Reporter does not take editorial stands; however, we do accept opinions from others. Today, Seminole Mayor Leslie Waters, a former speaker pro-tem in the Florida House of Representatives, discusses constitutional home rule, the theory that local governments know what’s best for local people.

PINELLAS COUNTY – It is midway through the 2021 Florida Legislative Session, bills and amendments are flying right and left, up and down! Committee meetings are hearing bills. Bills are being vetted. Legislation is being referred to one committee after another. Some of the hundreds of bills that have been filed may actually find their way to the floor of the Florida Senate and Florida House of Representatives for a final vote.

Many will die for lack of clear scrutiny and clarification, or due to time running out before the gavel comes down, but far too many bills will pass, flying in the face of a popular mantra, “Less Government, Less Legislation, Less Regulations.” Let’s help the bills that reflect “constitutional home rule” go the distance.

There are 411 local government entities in Florida – 282 incorporated cities, 109 towns, 20 villages, and thousands of elected local government officials. These officials are elected and are qualified to enact provisions that are best for their cities, not by a legislative body hundreds of miles away, by legislators who have never even driven through the majority of cities in Florida to personally see firsthand that all cities are not alike. City officials can help make legislation better!

“We Got This!”

It is definitely time to remind our distinguished and hard-working legislators of “constitutional home rule,” which addresses the importance of distinguishing issues that should be addressed by the Florida Legislature, and those issues that should be handled by cities.

As a former Florida Legislator for eight years and currently a mayor for past eight years, I know the difference.

This “home rule” provision in the Florida Constitution was voted on by the citizens of Florida 53 years ago. It allows local municipal commissions and councils to vigorously discuss, debate, decide and vote on issues of importance to the voters without interference by the state Legislature.

Home rule powers are very important to cities. It allows cities to be able to establish and enact their own ordinances, codes, plans and resolutions without prior state approval.

Home rule powers allow city councils to handle building design standards, short term rentals, home-based business issues that impact the citizens, the families, the businesses in their cities. Currently these topics are being bantered around in the Florida Legislature.

“We Got This!”

So to our friends in the Florida Legislature, please keep in touch with your local government officials during this legislative session, as well as all year around, on issues warranting discussion or clarification...for the betterment of “our” citizens.

The Florida League of Cities slogan for 2021 is “Local voices making local choices.” Sounds right to me!

“We Got This!”

For information about Waters, go to myseminole.com.