

# People & Politics



A proposed September special session on the oil spill effects in Florida was nixed by Speaker **Larry Cretul**, who said the issue could wait until March. “It would appear that, while there are some issues where legislative action may be appropriate, there are no issues that require immediate formal legislative action,” Cretul said. He and Senate President **Jeff Atwater** in July rebuffed efforts by Governor Charlie Crist to impose a constitutional ban on oil drilling in state waters, indicating they would weigh economic relief for businesses and stronger legal protections for those claiming damages in a potential special session.

**Greg Petesch**, the powerful and respected chief attorney and code commissioner for the Montana Legislature, recently retired after 31 years. He served some 1,500 legislators over the years and was held in high regard by members of both parties for his straightforward, often blunt, advice. Senate President **Bob Story** called him “a great intellect,” and Minority Leader **Carol Williams** said he is “almost irreplaceable. ... Everybody in both parties had terrific confidence in whatever his decisions happened to be.” He was lauded for advocating the Legislature’s equal constitutional authority, important for a body that meets only 90 days every two years. Williams gave the avid Boston Red Sox fan a picture of Curt Schilling pumping his fist after he pitched the second winning game of the 2004 World Series. “I thought it showed how Greg might have felt going out of the Capitol after he retired,” she said.

Representative **Leamon Fite Jr.** was a well-respected second term Alabama lawmaker and businessman when he died a year ago at age 54. His generosity and efforts to help others were well-known, with stories of school field trips, band uniforms, energy bills and other things quietly paid for by Fite. But it was his gift after death that stunned people—particularly the City Baptist Church congregation where he was a member. Fite bequeathed \$850,000 to the church for outreach and ministry. Fite’s parents and children presented the check this August. “We realize we’ve been given a blessing,” said Pastor Mike Holcomb.

Former Arkansas Speaker of the House **Bill Stovall** is the new—and first—chief of staff for the House. Stovall, who served as speaker in 2005 and 2006, was assistant to Speaker **Robbie Wills** and director of constituency services before assuming the new post. The position resulted from a reorganization of House personnel under the direction of Wills and Speaker-designate **Robert Moore**.

**David A. Gibson** had a lifetime of distinguished public service. He served in the Vermont Senate from 1977 to 1983, and then in 2000 became a respected Senate secretary known for integrity and trustworthiness. Gibson, 74, was hospitalized while attending the NCSL Legislative Summit in Kentucky this summer and was released with a diagnosis of advanced bile duct cancer. He died three weeks later. Gibson earned a reputation for his nonpartisan commitment to the institution and process. “It’s a tremendous loss to us all,” said Senate President Pro Tem **Peter Shum-**

**lin**, who called Gibson “an extraordinary Vermonter” who as secretary of the Senate served with “extraordinary distinction.”

Former Indiana Speaker Pro Tem **John Thomas** was eulogized as a “giant statesman,” an “inspiring public servant” and author of “one of the finest [home care] programs in the nation.” Thomas, who served 24 years in the Indiana House of Representatives, died in August at 84. Thomas founded a law firm in 1948 that produced two fellow state representatives: his brother **Amos Thomas** and his nephew **Andrew Thomas**. Another member of the firm was a state senator and U.S. congressman. Thomas served from 1967 to 1990, expanding educational opportunities, fighting for teachers and farmers, and improving mental health services.

Hawaii Senator **David Ige** recently received the National Association of State Chief Information Officers’ 2010 State Technology Innovator Award for his work supporting the Senate’s paperless initiative. Ige served as the Senate’s first Technology Leader, playing a key role as the Senate’s technology ambassador, working with senators, staff, and the general public to promote technology expansion within the legislative process. “David’s leadership—and his unfailing sense of humor during the inevitable glitches—ensured a seamless transition to a paperless operation for our senators and our constituents,” said Senator **Carol Fukunaga**, chair of the Senate’s Economic Development and Technology Committee. By the end of the Senate’s first “paperless” session in 2008, it had reduced its paper waste by 60 percent.

## It's a Dog's Life

Concerned that animals were not being treated as well as they should in some shelters, several state legislatures in the past few years have passed measures to improve shelter practices.

California lawmakers passed the Hayden Shelter Reform Law in 1999 that started the trend. It lengthens the state's previously short holding time—the period before an animal can be euthanized—from 72 hours to six business days. It recommends healthy, non-suffering animals should be euthanized only if they cannot be placed in a suitable home; these would include vicious dogs or those that pose a public health hazard. It also required shelters to release any requested animal to a qualifying non-profit rescue center or adoption group as an alternative to euthanasia.

In 2010, Delaware passed a bill similar to the Hayden Law, making its shelter regulations some of the most comprehensive in the country. The Delaware law requires all shelters to immediately inspect animals for identification and to wait at least three days before putting animals up for adoption or transferring them to another facility so owners have a chance to find lost pets. The law requires shelters to stay open beyond normal business hours so the public has a greater chance to adopt animals. And it requires shelters to post quarterly statistics on their websites regarding intake, adoption, reclamation, transfer and euthanasia rates.

Although the American Veterinary Medical Association has OK'd the use of gas chambers, animal rights groups assert they are cruel and unnecessarily frightening to dogs and cats. They have advocated for more humane methods, usually intravenous injection of sodium pentobarbital.

In the past two years, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, New York and West Virginia passed legislation that changed their euthanasia standards, joining the 13 other states that ban the use of gas chambers for animals.

## Synthetic Pot Peril

Synthetic cannabinoids—commonly known as “Spice,” “K2,” “Genie,” “Yucatan Fire,” “Sence,” “Smoke,” “Skunk” and “Zohai” —have become a popular legal alternative to marijuana. Until now, that is. At least ten states outlawed the drug this year.

The drug is sprayed onto dried herbs, marketed as “novelty herbal incense” or potpourri, and then smoked or ingested by consumers. It produces a high similar to marijuana and is sold in local convenience stores and over the Web. Although the product labels often read “not for human consumption,” abuse of these substances appears to be increasing. The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that, as of Sept. 27, more than 1,503 calls have been made to poison centers for symptoms such as racing heartbeat, elevated blood pressure and nausea. This is up from a total of only 14 calls in 2009.

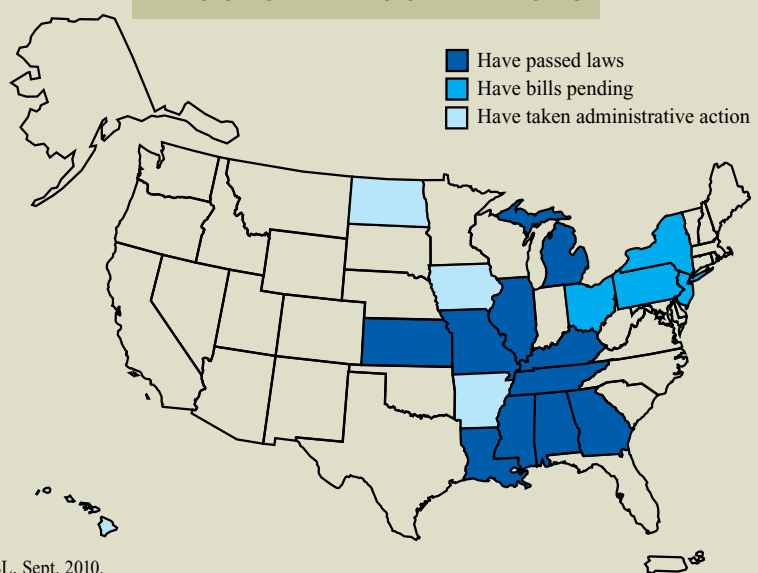
There also have been reports linking use of these drugs to hallucinations, seizures and even death. After a Minnesota teenager ended up in the hospital from using K2, Minnesota Senator Kathy Sieben announced plans to introduce legislation next session. She says protecting kids by outlawing these substances will be a top priority.

Kansas was the first state to pass legislation this year banning synthetic cannabinoids. Nine other states have passed similar measures making it illegal to possess, use, manufacture or sell the substances. Bills are pending in at least four other states as of the end of September.

Other action at the state level includes administrative bans in Arkansas, Hawaii, Iowa and North Dakota. The Hawaii Narcotics Enforcement Division, for example, applied an emergency ban on “chemicals in Spice/K2.” The ban is temporary, pending action by the Hawaii Legislature in the 2011 session. And in Idaho, a newly formed advisory committee is reviewing whether synthetic cannabinoids should be added to the list of controlled substances. They will make a recommendation to the Legislature before the 2011 session begins.



### BANS ON SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS



Source: NCSL, Sept. 2010.

# REVENUES RISE

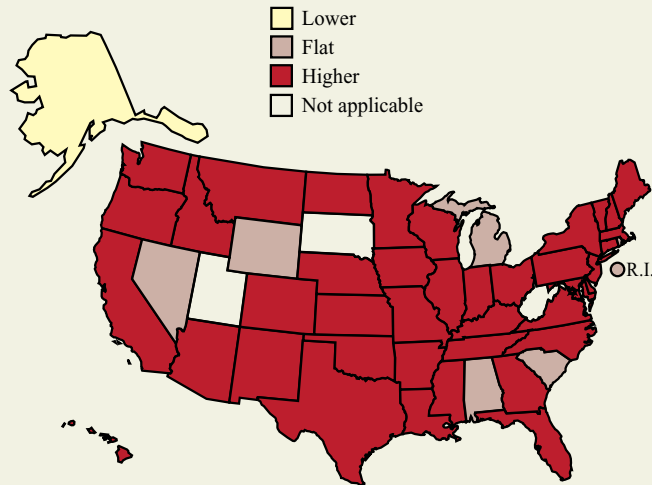
After several years of steep declines, state revenues are starting to pick up. In some states this means the rate of decline has slowed, but in others, revenues are actually increasing in one or more tax categories. Although still well below peak levels, nearly every state forecast has FY 2011 revenues exceeding last year's.

A year ago, more than half the states expected FY 2010 collections to be lower than FY 2009 amounts. This year, however, 40 states expect total tax collections in FY 2011 to be higher than they were in FY 2010. In 17 states, tax collections are expected to grow at least 5 percent. Three of these states expect collections to rise more than 10 percent: Colorado (10.8 percent), Oregon (12.1 percent) and Washington (14 percent). Each of these states has raised taxes, which helps partly to explain the growth.

Across the nation, officials are keeping a close watch on overall tax performance and whether it will hit targets. Many fiscal offices will revisit their forecasts as legislatures prepare for 2011 sessions. The next review will be critical in determining the strength of the economic recovery. But for now, it appears that state revenues hit bottom in FY 2010.

## LOOKING UP

(Tax Growth Forecasts for FY 2011)



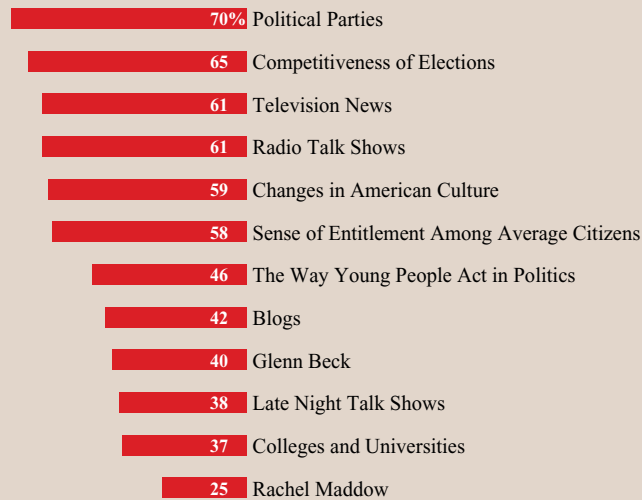
Source: NCSL, based on July 2010 responses to survey.

# WHO KILLED CIVILITY?

While 87 percent of Americans believe people can disagree about politics respectfully, even more—95 percent—believe civility in politics is vital for a healthy democracy. But nearly 50 percent of Americans believe we are moving in the wrong direction and that there has been a clear deterioration in the tone of politics since Barack Obama became president. Of those who pay close attention to politics, some 60 percent feel so. These are the findings in a recent Allegheny College survey designed to gauge attitudes and perception of civility in politics.

So, who do those surveyed believe is to blame for this decline in respect?

## WHO OR WHAT HAS PUSHED POLITICS TO BECOME LESS CIVIL?



Source: Nastiness, Name-Calling & Negativity, Allegheny College, April 20, 2010.

# College Success

Although more and more students are enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities, the proportion of who earn a degree or credential continues to decline. Among today's 25- to 34-year-olds, only a little more than 40 percent have a post-secondary degree. Comparing 2007 data, the United States ranks 12th among the 36 countries with the highest graduation rates. The top countries, according to the College Board, are:



**CANADA**  
55.8%



**SOUTH KOREA**  
55.5%



**RUSSIA**  
55.5%



**JAPAN**  
53.7%



**NEW ZEALAND**  
47.3%



**IRELAND**  
43.9%



**NORWAY**  
42.7%



**ISRAEL**  
41.5%



**FRANCE**  
41.4%



**BELGIUM**  
41.3%



**AUSTRALIA**  
40.7%



**UNITED STATES**  
40.4%

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