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## Legislators Uniting Around Fixes For State Election Problems

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TALLAHASSEE -- Secretary of State Ken Detzner all but guaranteed that a set of recommendations he submitted Monday would help Florida overcome the long lines on Election Day that left voters grumbling and once again made the state the butt of late-night comedians' jokes.

In a 12-page report published Monday, Detzner called for an optional extension of early voting days, an expansion of the number of early voting sites available for county supervisors of elections and new limits on the length of ballot summaries for constitutional amendments offered by the Legislature. He also called on county commissions to more closely follow budget and policy recommendations from the supervisors.

The recommendations were largely in line with what is emerging as a bipartisan consensus about how to handle the snafus that plagued the November presidential election, when Florida was the last state in which a winner was projected.

"The bottom line is: Voter confidence must be restored," Detzner told the House Ethics and Elections Subcommittee in a hearing Monday afternoon. "Voters are relying on us to ensure their elections are accessible, efficient and fair."

And Detzner left little wiggle room when pressed on how certain he was that the recommendations in his report would prevent a recurrence of the issues that sprang up in November.

"I am 100 percent confident that my report and our recommendations will solve the problem," he said.

Detzner's recommendations would allow supervisors to offer up to 14 days of

early voting, though they could stick with the current eight days or pick some number in between. And in addition to a limit on the word length on legislative amendments, Detzner said a provision in state law allowing the full text of an amendment to be placed on the ballot should be repealed.

Senate Ethics and Elections Chairman Jack Latvala, R-St. Petersburg, filed legislation Monday (SB 600) that would get rid of that language and make other changes relating to absentee ballot certificates and the buffer zone for voters at polling places.

Lawmakers say that they are close to what Detzner and the supervisors of elections are proposing. A chart giving the areas the House subcommittee is likely to address in a bill mirrored the suggestions.

"I think between the three groups ... there's a lot of consistency in some of the issues that we can address," said Rep. Jim Boyd, the Bradenton Republican who chairs the subcommittee.

But there are still some details to work through. Boyd's chart lists a provision that would only limit the first summary in a legislatively-proposed amendment if lawmakers added more than one summary as a backstop against court challenges to the ballot language. And if the attorney general were forced to write a new summary after a court challenge, that would not be subject to the limit.

Democrats raised minor objections to that and are also pushing to broaden the scope of early voting measures. Rep. Alan Williams, D-Tallahassee, said the state should consider mandating eight hours of early voting; under Boyd's proposal, a supervisor could offer anywhere from six hours to 12.

"We're not going outside of what many of the supervisors of elections' hours of operation already are with at least eight hours," Williams said.

Other groups are also pushing for more change. Ron Bilbao of the ACLU of Florida told the committee that the state should also consider allowing same-day voter registration, expanding the forms of identification voters could use at the polls and making it easier for felons to regain the right to vote after they've served their sentence.

Bilbao made it clear his organization supported the changes being considered.

"But Florida has a history of dysfunctional elections, and if all we do to address these problems is address the problems that voters endured this November, in 2012, then we'll have lost an opportunity to address the badly-needed reforms that Florida needs to do," he said.