

Alliance learns of progress amid legislative 'insanity

'DAVID DIPINO Sun Sentinel

Four local Democratic lawmakers, back from a legislative session in Tallahassee, addressed members of the Alliance of Delray Residential Associations during the organization's May meeting, offering news on a range of topics, from corruption to struggling homeowners associations to the problem of "sexting" in schools.

Barbara Zee, vice president of legislative affairs for the Alliance, attended the legislative session. "What I thought was an intense couple of months was more than that," Zee said. "It's insanity up there."

While Zee was in Tallahassee, she was joined by Alliance president Robert Schulbaum and Dr. Lori Vinikoor, vice president of special projects. The Delray team voiced support for bills introduced by state Reps. Maria Sachs (District 86, [Delray Beach](#)), Kevin Rader (District 78, western portions of Palm Beach, Martin and St. Lucie counties including downtown Fort Pierce), Joseph Abruzzo (District 85, [Wellington](#)) and Kelly Skidmore, (District 90, [Boca Raton](#) and Deerfield Beach).

Sachs' focus was a bill that she said will help both condo and homeowners associations recoup losses from foreclosures and vacant properties. "It's big," she said, "and I think [Gov. Charlie Crist](#) is going to sign it."

Sachs added that she will not seek re-election for the District 86 seat. She told the Alliance she'll instead run for the District 30 seat in the Florida Senate.

Education was also a hot topic, most notably Senate Bill 6, which recently caused an uproar with its provision that teachers be paid on merit. Ed Berger, a retired New York City schoolteacher and a member of the Alliance board, sits on a blue ribbon education panel that Sachs recently created.

"We meet regularly, and she listens to what we have to say," he said. "Between [the Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations] and the Alliance of Delray Residential Associations Inc., our voice was heard, and Gov. Crist vetoed that bill."

Rader introduced House Bill 1301, an anti-corruption bill aimed at strengthening penalties against elected officials who break the law. District 27 Sen. Dave Aronberg co-sponsored the bill, while Sachs and Abruzzo also supported it.

"Government officials shouldn't be looking at ways to make money on the side," Rader said.

Rader, who plans to leave his District 78 seat to run for the District 27 seat that will open up when Aronberg runs for attorney general, thanked Alliance members for their involvement.

"It's groups like the Alliance and COBWRA [that] do a tremendous amount of service," Rader said. "Without your help, we wouldn't be the legislators we are and be able to do the work we do."

Abruzzo told Alliance members he introduced a bill that provides funds for soldiers' families during hard times, an environmental bill that closes a loophole allowing people to claim state lands that were bought to save the environment, a "pill mill" measure designed to fight pain clinics and a sexting bill that would help minors by making the first two offenses misdemeanors. Currently, a minor who sends a pornographic message via text could be charged with a felony and be required to register as a sex offender if convicted. Under Abruzzo's bill, the third offense would be a felony.