

## PROGRAM PLANNING

**League program** consists of governmental issues chosen for study and action, and includes both adopted positions upon which action is taken and *issues for study that will lead to a position and action*. In Program Planning (at all three levels of League) we are interested only in that last section - **issues for study that will lead to a position and action**.

League members should measure their proposed new study/ program item against the following criteria:

1. The proposed study falls within League Principles.
2. The League does not have a position that can be used for action in this area.
3. Government action is needed and political realities permit effective action.
4. Widespread interest exists among members and the issue is timely.
5. The issue is being addressed at the appropriate level, i.e., local issues at the local level, state issues at the state level, and national and international issues at the national level.
6. The League can have a unique impact in this area and working on the issue will increase the League's influence and credibility.
7. Funding will be available, either from outside funding (rarely successful) or by increasing PMP temporarily.
8. The League will be able to use the issue to attract allies and build coalitions to help share the load.

Leagues and League members who have a topic that meets the criteria for Program Planning may choose one or more of the following options on the Report Form:

1. **Suggest an existing LWVUS position for Review/Update** (depending on the amount of updating necessary, this can require a PMP increase of \$.80 - \$2.00 for one year)
2. **Recommend a new study/program item** (requiring a PMP increase of \$3.00/year for two years).
3. **Recommend a new study/program item for concurrence** (requiring a PMP increase of \$1.20/year for one year). In addition, according to the bylaws, a League planning to propose the adoption or amendment of a national League position by concurrence on the floor of convention must send background information, including pros and cons on the issue and an explanation of the rationale for using this form of member agreement, to all Leagues at least six weeks before convention.

## ISSUES CURRENTLY BEING DISCUSSED FOR POSSIBLE STUDY OR CONCURRENCE

### REDISTRICTING

Mary Wilson, LWVUS Advocacy Committee Chair, points out the widespread interest in various states, and says, "Even if states are not subjected to redistricting "reform" efforts, in one way or another EVERY State League typically provides input into and takes action on redistricting in their states after each census. Leagues want to be active in this area because they recognize that if districts are drawn in a biased manner, representative democracy suffers." Mary asks:

Should redistricting be left in the hands of State legislators or should it be done by an independent commission?

If it is accomplished by a commission, how should the commission be appointed?

Should the commission be advisory only?

Should it be independent and what does “independent” mean?

Should it be nonpartisan, bipartisan or partisan?

How should commissioners be selected?

Should Congress legislate on how states should redraw Congressional district boundaries or continue to leave it to the states?

Although we advocate transparency in the redistricting process, what are the mechanisms for achieving maximum public participation?

How can the public best participate when the process has become one of sophisticated computer analyses and data manipulation?

How can the need for transparency and public input be balanced against assuring nonpartisanship?

Should redistricting be accomplished in a way that will make legislative seats more competitive?

How will “competitiveness” be defined?

Should competitiveness override the need for geographic compactness?

How do you define “community of interest”?

Should redistricting take place only once every ten years or should continuous redistricting be permitted?

Several discussions focused on the benefit of a redistricting study as a way to update members on this issue, saying that “...a national study/update would be a good way to acquaint all League members about the issues, current redistricting practices, their strengths and weaknesses, and potential solutions. This might start a movement by state Leagues to address this serious weakness in our current electoral system.”

## **ELECTION SYSTEMS**

**Election system reform** has been the issue most discussed, primarily proportional representation (PR), but also multi-member districts. In both instances, members see a relationship and an overlap between this type of reform and redistricting. For instance, proponents say that PR and multi-member districts make gerrymandering far less effective.

One suggested an update of the LWVUS redistricting position that would include education about multi-member districts and proportional voting as an option to the current single member district, winner take all system. The present “one party system” (35-40% of voters are ineffective) does nothing to help the League achieve the goals of Making Democracy Work, nor does it fulfill the League mission, and may be a primary cause of voter apathy.

**Multi-member districts** - One member suggested that districts could be combined and voters would, for instance, elect 5 members in a 5 member district, instead of one member. In this type of “super district,” the voter ranks the candidates by preference and a candidate would only need to get 17% of the vote to ensure election.

**Proportional representation** - As explained by participants, there are many PR systems, but they all share two key ingredients: (1) at least some of the districts elect more than one person, and (2) votes are allocated to candidates proportionally. According to proponents, benefits of PR include increased voter turnout, conformity of government policies with public opinion, and better representation of minority populations.

League members proposed to broaden the redistricting discussion and restudy it to determine whether or not single-member districts actually "Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive." Opponents say that non-competitive districts are neither accountable nor responsive, but proponents argue that competitive districts, by definition, are not representative, because they deny representation to almost half the voters.

## **VOTING MACHINES**

Discussion about voting machines have focused on the pros and cons of the need for a voter verifiable paper (VVP) record. When this discussion came up at Convention 2004, delegates passed a resolution calling for systems to be Secure, Accurate, Re-countable, and Accessible (SARA), leaving it up to local and state Leagues to use these standards by which to judge their community's equipment.

There has been a concern that many League members think that SARA requires a paper trail and that this confusion exists because delegates passed the resolution without fully understanding technical issues. Others are critical of SARA because of the difficulty they perceive for local and state Leagues to determine whether or not a system meets SARA's criteria.

Some local Leagues are conducting their own studies on voting equipment. One League told of their local study and a study committee that benefited from the technical expertise of some of the committee members. "When it comes to the complicated software-- and hardware-- used for electronic voting, few Leaguers have the knowledge required to make informed judgments. (And we're smart enough to recognize it!)"

Extrapolating this experience to the national level, they believe the solution is to have a national study. "I can envision a similar process providing a LWVUS Policy position that would become the basis for national decisions related to voting systems and procedures."

On the other hand, supporters of SARA like the fact that it is so broad and general. "The League needs a position that will accommodate a variety of possible voting systems." They express concern about positions that are too narrowly drawn. "We now try to base our consensus items on broad principles (like SARA) so that we have maximum flexibility of response, and it works well."

One participant, whose community successfully uses optically, scanned ballots, said, "Recountable is a much better formulation than voter verifiable paper record, which would not be satisfied by the excellent system we have locally."

Others oppose a study that has such technical implications. "Generally, a League study involves a topic on which ordinary citizens (League members) have some experience and can, through study, gain deeper and broader perspective and understanding of the basic issues and their ramifications. The proposed study would involve highly technical implementation matters, but would add little additional perspective on the basic issues."

## **IMMIGRATION**

A study of immigration policy that would include immigrants, asylees and refugees. (Although different, these three are grouped in the minds of most people simply as immigrants.)

Immigration policy has come up convention after convention but is always overtaken by another topic. Some argue that it would be difficult to reach consensus while others say consensus is less the issue than becoming informed on this critical issue.

## **DEATH PENALTY**

At the 2006 convention, the LWV of Illinois will be asking delegates to concur with their position on the death penalty by adopting this position: "The League of Women Voters of the United States supports the abolition of the death penalty."

They suggest that a national study is unnecessary and a concurrence is appropriate if a number of local/state Leagues have studied an issue and have come to similar or identical positions. In other words, why require other state Leagues or the national League to reinvent the wheel?

Please note we will be asking for Concurrence on the Floor of the Convention. If adopted on the Convention Floor no PMP increase will be required.

## **LEAGUE LINGO**

To understand the program planning process one needs to begin by understanding the definitions of several key words.

### **Program**

Program is the word we use to describe issues we wish to study to reach consensus or just inform ourselves or members of our community.

### **Program Priorities**

When the word priorities, is linked with the word program the meaning changes. Program priorities is the phrase we use to designate issues that LWVUS will focus on for the January-December calendar year. The period is parallel to the congressional calendar year.

### **Issues**

Issues are subjects on which congress or state and local governments might take action (vote). The publication, **Impact on Issues**, contains a list of all our positions on issues that have been adopted nationally. **Where We Stand** is the publication that documents all our positions that we have adopted at the state level. Both documents give you a brief statement of our position, a detailed statement of our position and the history of how we arrived at each issue. A League may write a letter, make a public statement or launch an action campaign on any issues where the League has a position. Because the League has been studying and reaching consensus for 85 years, we have positions on a great many issues.

### **Positions**

Positions are reached by the League gathering information, studying the information, informing its membership, and then having a consensus meeting where members decide their opinions about the issue in response to a set of questions posed by the board.. All of those opinions are then reviewed by the national, state, or local committee (depending on who initiated the study) and a position is written from what has been said by each League at each consensus meeting. This position is then brought to the appropriate board, who adopts or rejects it (with or without changes). It then will go along with all of the League's positions to the local, state, or national meeting to be approved by the delegates. The position is in place once the board adopts it and Leagues may use it when appropriate to lobby for

legislative action. Note: if members in PA adopt a position at a PA convention it can only be used in PA unless other states or national decides to adopt the position at their state or national convention. And, each position must be in conformity with those adopted at higher levels (e.g., local positions in conformity with state and national).

### **Consensus**

Consensus is the result of research and study. It requires members to discuss what they have learned and reach common opinions on a number of points within the issue. In many cases, it is because of discussion (not voting) that one finds “common ground”. The League is relatively unique in having consensus meetings to decide on an organizational opinion. It takes a long time and in many cases a lot of money but it does give the position more weight and meaning.

### **Concurrence**

Concurrence is the action of agreeing to and adopting a position that has been voted on/ adopted by another League after they have studied, reached consensus and adopted a position on an issue.

### **Update**

Sometimes a League position may not address a portion of an issue or our country and the world have changed to the point that our League position seems dated or no longer accurately reflects the views of our members. In such a case, an update of a current position is in order. It requires less staff and member work as it encompasses a narrower focus or some information is already collected.

### **PMP**

Per Member Payment (PMP) is how the League finances itself. In our League we charge \$48 for dues. \$23.80 is sent to LWVUS to support our national office and program, \$18.50 is sent to LWVPA to support our state office and program and an additional ?\$1.50? is allocated for County and regional program and advocacy. \$4.20 is kept of the dues collected to pay for the Voter, voter information, programs and advocacy done at the local level.