

League of Women Voters of Oklahoma

PROGRAM FOR ACTION

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

GENERAL INFORMATION

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The League of Women Voters is open to all persons age 16 or older. Men are eligible for membership and welcome to join the ranks of others concerned about public issues and policy.

The name was adopted with the founding of the organization in February 1920, shortly after ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution by which women were given the right to vote. The League's purpose was to continue the participation in public affairs by those who had worked for over 50 years toward the achievement of suffrage for women.

The objectives of the League have always been:

- Fostering education in citizenship and supporting needed legislation,
- Encouraging interest in government and in national problems,
- Promoting participation in the civic life of our country,
- Stimulating activity in public affairs, particularly registering and voting in every election,
- Developing intelligent use of votes by the women of the United States,
- Rendering such other services in the interest of education in citizenship as may be possible,
- Nurturing the mutual improvement of the members, and
- Participating in every act appropriate or necessary to carry out any of these objectives.

Membership in a local League includes membership in the state League of Women Voters and the League of Women Voters of the United States. The organization works at all three levels of government as a *nonpartisan* organization to encourage informed and active participation of citizens through education and advocacy.

NONPARTISANSHIP

LWVOK Bylaws, Article II. Section 2. Nonpartisanship

– The League shall not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

Nonpartisanship is a basic principle of League, stated in the National and State Constitutions and affirmed by each local League. This means that, while no political position may be taken by an individual member during engagement in League projects,

members are free to be partisan in other contexts. Only the local President and the Voter Service Chair are precluded from any active partisan political action or from holding public office.

The League never endorses or opposes any political candidate or party. The League speaks only to issues and only to those positions that have been arrived at through the member consensus process.

PRINCIPLES

The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible.

The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in her/his right to vote; that every person should have access to a free public education that provides equal opportunity for all, and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government:

- is responsive to the will of the people,
- maintains an equitable and flexible system of taxation,
- promotes the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest,
- shares in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare,
- promotes a sound economy, and
- adopts domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.

The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems, and that the development of an international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

CONSENSUS

Consensus in the League means agreement among a substantial number of members (representative of the membership as a whole) reached after sustained study and group discussion. It is not just a simple majority or necessarily unanimity.

Consensus within a group that is meeting together for discussion is “the sense of the meeting.” It comes after careful study of the facts and free discussion in which the expression of all points of view have been encouraged and the views of the minority considered with those of the majority.

In reporting the results of discussion to the local League board, the information will include the number of members attending, areas and degree of agreement, the minority view and its strength, and areas in which the group was undecided or lacked sufficient information needed to make a decision.

Determining consensus of the members within the local League is the responsibility of the local League board. It is an interpretive process and a continuous one calling for foresight, clear lines of communication between the board and the will of all the members. In considering reports from discussion units, the Board considers all the members together – not by units. (State Board on state programs; National Board on national programs.)

Note: When a local position is deemed relevant to the entire state, members at the state convention may adopt the local position by **concurrence** after each local League has had the opportunity to review and discuss the local study.

POSITION

When the body of opinion expressed in consensus has been put into words by the appropriate board (local, state, or national), it is called a position. See Appendix I for information on national positions.

ACTION

League action includes:

- Providing information to the community on League program subjects,
- Developing public support of League positions, and
- Supporting specific measures to promote the position.

When a “time for action” on a governmental issue is announced, only the president (local, state or national) speaks for the League as an organization. Each member, however, is urged to contact her/his local official, legislator, or congressman and express her/his own conviction, whether based on League study or other information speaking not as a League member, but as a concerned citizen. Each member is encouraged to design such action to fit the circumstances and the occasion.

PROGRAM

LWVOK Bylaws, Article XI. Section 2. Program. The Program of the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma shall consist of action to protect the right to vote of every citizen and those governmental issues chosen for concerted study and action.

Through its program, the League gives sustained attention to, and takes concerned action on, issues chosen by the members. Through its voter service, the League provides nonpartisan, factual information on the structure and function of government, on political parties, and on voting procedures, candidates and issues.

Concerns of the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma, reflected in the studies undertaken and consensus reached, have placed the League in the forefront, ready for action, when the state has faced its greatest problems in recent years. Prominent issues such as taxes, education, prison reform, water quality and supply, county government, juvenile justice, and the ongoing need for constitutional revision have appeared on the League's agenda parallel with and sometimes prior to, their appearance on the agenda of the state's governmental bodies.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OKLAHOMA

PROGRAM POSITIONS

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

APPORTIONMENT

Support action for apportionment based substantially on population of congressional districts and of all elected state and local governmental bodies

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that both houses of the state legislature should be apportioned substantially on population. The LWVOK is convinced that this standard, established by apportionment decisions of the Supreme Court, should be maintained and that the U. S. Constitution should not be amended to allow for consideration of factors other than population in apportioning either or both houses of state legislatures.

Of overriding importance to the LWVOK in coming to this decision is the conviction that a population standard is the fairest and most equitable way of assuring that each person's vote is of equal value in a democratic and representative government. Other considerations influencing LWVOK decisions are that the U.S. Constitution should not be amended hastily or without due consideration because of an "unpopular" court decision, and that individual rights now protected by the Constitution should not be weakened or abridged.

Against the background of its long-standing interest in state government, the LWVOK also hopes that, by maintaining a population standard, state government may be strengthened by ensuring that state legislatures are representative of people wherever they live. Finally, the LWVOK is certain that the term "substantially" used in Supreme Court decisions allows for adequate flexibility for districting to provide for any necessary local diversity.

Consensus approved 1979

BACKGROUND

The United States Constitution requires reapportionment of election districts every ten years following the decennial census, with state legislatures having the responsibility for drawing the boundary lines for congressional, state, and local districts. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1962 and 1964 that both houses of state legislatures must be apportioned substantially on population.

The Oklahoma Legislature was one of those affected by the Supreme Court ruling. However, efforts at reapportionment met resistance finally ending in a court battle. The court finally accepted a plan prepared by a member of the LWVOK. Based on this solution, reapportionment became an actuality in 1964.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) adopted a position on apportionment in 1966. At its 1979 convention, the LWVOK chose to adopt portions of the national position in order to act more effectively at the state level to insure protection of the one-person-one-vote doctrine in any redistricting which might occur.

In January 1981, the LWVOK published a booklet on reapportionment in Oklahoma. The LWVOK planned to update the booklet when the 1990 census figures were finalized and to monitor carefully the reapportionment of the state legislature. Nothing has been found in the LWVOK records to indicate whether the update and monitoring occurred.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Support for strong, enforceable conflict of interest legislation and financial disclosure

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes Oklahoma needs stronger, more inclusive, enforceable conflict of interest legislation. We believe this can best be accomplished through an amendment to the State Constitution.

A uniform conflict of interest law should extend to all elected officials, candidates for office, some appointed officials, and department heads responsible for policy decisions and expenditures.

The LWVOK believes financial disclosure is a critical element in any conflict of interest legislation. Disclosure must provide enough information to identify any conflict of interest. The source of income and percentage of assets and liabilities held are more important in financial disclosure than reporting net worth. This information should be required of all office holders, some appointed officials and candidates, as well as their immediate family members. Financial disclosure information should be easily accessible to the public for inspection.

Consensus approved 1983

BACKGROUND

Delegates to the 1981 LWVOK Convention were presented with a request from Common Cause and other organizations asking that the LWVOK join in the Oklahoma coalition For Government Ethics (FORGE) and take part in circulating an initiative petition to put a conflict of interest amendment on the ballot. In order to determine whether or not the LWVOK could take this action, the convention voted to undertake a study of the need for conflict of interest and financial disclosure legislation at all levels of government.

Because of the deadline for presenting the petition, a summer study was undertaken by all Leagues in the state with consensus being reached in September 1983.

It was determined by the LWVOK Board of Directors that the study had not been thorough enough to launch an all-out petition drive. However, it was decided to support the intent of the petition and to encourage local Leagues to work on the petition circulation if they desired to do so. The petition failed to receive the needed number of signatures.

In 1986, legislation creating an Ethics Commission was passed. Many observers felt that Oklahoma now had a strong ethics law. However, initial funding for the new Commission amounted to only \$100,000 for the first year of operation, signaling a lack of real commitment on the part of the Legislature for a strong conflict of interest and financial disclosure law.

The first year of implementation brought problems and court challenges to the new ethics law. During the 1987 legislative session, changes were made that were not completely beneficial. Funding did not increase for the Commission's operation.

Although the 1988 legislature doubled funding, it also passed legislation further weakening the already crippled Ethics Commission. The Commission was renamed "Oklahoma Council on Campaign Compliance and Ethical Standards."

In 1989 the Constitutional Revision Study Commission appointed by Governor Henry Bellmon proposed adding a new section to the state constitution creating a five-member Ethics Commission. The LWVOK helped gather signatures for the initiative petition to bring the proposed amendment to a vote of the people. The amendment was approved September 18, 1990 and the new constitutionally-mandated Ethics Commission officially came into existence on July 1, 1991.

The citizens of the state were soon to discover that the debate over ethics was just beginning. As required by the new amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution, the new Ethics Commission wrote a set of rules that had to be submitted to the Legislature by January 1992. The Legislature disapproved all the Commission's proposed rules and, in HR 1077, substituted its own statutory set of rules. The Ethics Commission filed suit against the Legislature asking the Supreme Court to accept original jurisdiction. The

LWVOK joined Common Cause and Consumer Watch in filing an *amici curae* brief in support of the Commission.

The Supreme Court accepted original jurisdiction and, after hearing arguments from both sides, handed down a decision on March 30, 1993. The court ruled that the section of HJR 1077 disapproving all of the rules submitted by the Ethics Commission was constitutional. All parties had accepted that fact. However, the Court ruled that the Legislature did not have the constitutional right to substitute its own set of rules.

The Ethics Commission resumed their work in the summer and fall of 1993, writing a new set of ethics rules to submit to the Legislature. The new set of rules was submitted to the Legislature in February 1994.

In May 1994, the Attorney General issued an opinion that said the Legislature was authorized to disapprove of an individual Ethics Commission rule without having to disapprove the entire package. The Attorney General's opinion further stated that the Legislature might not disapprove of just a portion of an individual rule without disapproving the entire rule. Nothing has been found in the LWVOK archives to indicate what subsequent actions were taken regarding the Ethics Commission.

CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION

Support for major constitutional revision in Oklahoma

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes the state constitution should provide a flexible framework within which state government can function effectively in the face of rapidly changing conditions, and should provide adequate protection for individual rights and liberties. The constitution should clearly define the responsibilities of the three branches of government and grant them adequate powers to carry out these responsibilities. The constitution should express only fundamental law and principle.

The present Oklahoma Constitution fails to meet these criteria; therefore, the LWVOK recommends major constitutional reform efforts. If the convention route is chosen, it should be preceded by extensive study and research conducted by an adequately financed, professionally staffed group. A call to convention should provide for nonpartisan election of delegates on an equitably apportioned basis representing diverse interests of the state with some limitations on elected officials serving as delegates. A convention should be limited as to its duration and size. A constitutional convention should have the discretion to submit its revised document to the voters in its entirety or separately, article by article.

Guidelines for a Legislative Article: The LWVOK supports a bicameral legislature with both houses apportioned on a one-person, one-vote principle. The legislature should be permitted to meet in annual sessions of unlimited length and should have

some power to call itself into session. The constitution should not set the amount of legislative salaries. Any statute governing legislators (for example, salaries) should not go into effect until the next legislature convenes. The LWVOK believes that legislative procedures should be governed by statute and should not be in the Constitution. The LWVOK also feels that requirements for getting bills out of committee should be less stringent than they are currently.

Guidelines for Rights of Citizens: The LWVOK believes the Oklahoma Bill of Rights should be rewritten in more concise language, eliminating present provisions that do not pertain to individual rights. It should provide rights such as:

- Legal counsel for serious crimes when a defendant is unable to provide it for her/himself,
- Provisions for means of restoring voting rights of former felons and mental patients,
- The citizens' right to the initiative and referendum,
- No increases in the present requirement for signatures on a petition, and
- The elimination of the "silent vote" provision.

The "silent vote" (people voting in an election but not voting on a particular amendment) was eliminated in 1974. The LWVOK reaffirms the need to protect the right to referendum through support of measures to clarify the "emergency clause" which allows for immediate enactment of laws without a mechanism for public input. Throughout the constitution there are numerous outdated technical provisions and restrictions as well as discriminatory suffrage provisions that should be eliminated.

Guidelines for an Executive Article: The LWVOK believes the governor should be chief executive in fact as well as in name. The constitution should be revised to increase the governor's administrative authority over the executive department by substantially increasing her/his appointive powers, and by consolidation of departments and agencies under her/his authority. The governor and lieutenant governor should be elected from the same party on a single ballot. Election of other executive officials should be limited to major policy-making offices.

Guidelines for a Judicial Article: The constitution should provide a unified court structure for Oklahoma, with well-established lines of administrative authority and responsibility, adaptable to changing needs. In addition, it should permit division of courts into geographic or functional jurisdiction as needed. The LWVOK believes in a constitutional court on the judiciary for the removal of justices and judges. The LWVOK recommends improved methods of judicial election to provide a thoroughly qualified and independent judiciary, with the state judges being taken out of politics as much as possible. To accomplish this, the LWVOK supports appointment of judges from an approved list with periodic submission to the people to confirm or oppose retention. The LWVOK believes the minor court structure should be improved:

- by staffing the courts with judges who are lawyers and are paid fixed salaries from the general fund,

- by the courts being courts of record,
- by the court jurisdiction extending to all cases of relatively minor importance, and
- by each court serving an area large enough to justify proper court organization.

Guidelines for Corporation Commission: The constitution should include only general provisions for a regulatory agency for corporations, retaining the right of arbitration and of recourse to the courts. Implementation and other procedural matters should be left to the Legislature.

Guidelines for Education: The Constitution of Oklahoma should state that the Legislature should provide for maintenance and support of the system of free public schools open to all children in the state. And it also should establish, organize, and support such public institutions of higher learning as may be desirable. The LWVOK believes that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction should be appointed.

Guidelines for Fiscal Policy: The LWVOK reaffirms the urgent need for statewide equalization of property tax assessments. The LWVOK believes earmarking of funds should be eliminated from the constitution and that the executive department boards should be responsible to the governor for their annual budgets. The governor, in turn, should be required by the constitution to present a budget message to the Legislature.

Guidelines for Revenue and Taxation: The LWVOK believes Article X of the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma should be shortened and simplified to make it more flexible. All specific details should be removed, including debt ceilings and millage caps. All obsolete sections should be removed.

Guidelines for County and Municipal Government: The Constitution should provide general grants of power with specific provisions left to the legislative body and/or home rule charters. The Constitution should provide for maximum local self-government at the county and municipal levels. Provisions should be made for local government units to reorganize, restructure, or consolidate according to needs. Local governmental units should be granted the general power to tax, but the determination of methods and limitations should be delegated to the legislature. The number of elected local governmental officials should be reduced by appointment of qualified persons to administrative positions.

Consensus approved 1969
Revised Fiscal Policy approved 1989
Consensus, Revenue and Taxation approved 1989

BACKGROUND

The Oklahoma Constitution requires that the people be allowed to vote every twenty years on the question of calling a convention for the purpose of revising and updating that document. Although this provision has been frequently ignored, delegates to the 1965 LWVOK Convention directed the League to undertake a thorough study of the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma, anticipating the possibility that the 1970 vote of the people on a constitutional convention might be favorable.

LWVOK members launched a two-year study that resulted in consensus on the kinds of constitutional changes that they wished to support or oppose. In 1967, the LWVOK supported bills that created a constitutional revision interim study committee. When such a committee was formed, two members of the LWVOK served as appointees.

In 1970 voters were given a choice of: 1) a call to constitutional convention or 2) revision using the article-by-article method. Both ideas were overwhelmingly defeated despite LWVOK efforts to educate the voters as to the need.

Publications which resulted from the LWVOK study include the two-part *Study of the State Constitution*, published in 1966 and 1967, aided by a grant from the Sears Roebuck Foundation; *The Constitution of Oklahoma: Framework or Bailing Wire?*, published in 1976 as a bicentennial project; and *Framework for Government, Oklahoma's Constitution*, published in 1980.

These publications were in demand, not only by the general public, but also by the Constitutional Revision Study Commission appointed by Governor Bellmon in 1988. The responsibilities of the Commission were to reexamine the constitution and to hold public hearings on constitutional revision, with a possible call to a constitutional convention in 1990. One of the members appointed by the governor was a LWVOK member who chaired the subcommittee to rewrite the Bill of Rights.

During 1988-89 the LWVOK studied Article X, Revenue and Taxation. The consensus of the 1989 LWVOK Convention was that issues of taxation and revenue should be considered as legislation, and that the constitution should be fundamental law only.

In 1989, after a successful initiative petition drive, Oklahoma voters adopted an amendment to the constitution that shortened the length of the legislative session. The LWVOK unsuccessfully opposed this amendment.

In 1990, there should have been, but was not, an opportunity for the people to vote on a call to a constitutional convention. Instead, as a result of a recommendation from the Constitutional Revision Study Commission, LWVOK supported an initiative petition drive to put on the ballot amendments making major changes in Article VI (Executive Departments) and Article IX (Corporations) and a new article creating an Ethics Commission. Sufficient signatures were obtained, but an Oklahoma Supreme Court ruling kept the proposed changes to Articles VI and IX off the ballot. The amendment creating the Ethics Commission was approved.

An August 1990 amendment removed unconstitutional restrictions on who may vote in bond elections and gave the legislature the authority to set interest rates on bonds for industrial development. The LWVOK opposed it. Also approved in 1990 was an amendment to limit the terms of future members of the Legislature. It became effective January 1, 1991.

In March 1992, voters approved SQ640, another amendment opposed by LWVOK. It required a vote of the people on any revenue bill not attaining a three-quarters majority vote in both houses of the Legislature. This, in effect, created a permanent ban on any tax increases in the state.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Support for reform of county government in Oklahoma

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that changes are needed in the operation and management of county government in Oklahoma, to achieve a government that is more efficient, modern and accountable to the people.

The LWVOK favors a commissioner form of county government, but feels that it may not be suitable for all counties. The option of home rule should be extended to all counties, permitting them to determine their own form of government.

The LWVOK believes that, under the commission form of county government, commissioners should serve as policy makers concerned with the entire county, not individual districts. Commissioners should be elected at-large from districts in which they reside, with a county manager hired to carry out administrative responsibilities.

County administrative offices should be consolidated. Appointed or hired officers should be under the supervision of the county manager. The LWVOK continues to support elimination of the office of County Superintendent of Schools.

Greater efficiency and economy in county government would be achieved through use of city-county cooperation or consolidation of services such as in planning, solid waste disposal, libraries, health departments, and emergency medical services. Inter-county use of data processing and police technical services should be encouraged. The LWVOK recommends employing a county road superintendent and centralizing the use of road equipment. Laws pertaining to county government must be recodified in order to make them easier to locate and understand.

The LWVOK believes that the ad valorem tax should continue to be the primary source of revenue for county government. However, equalization of ad valorem taxes and consistency in assessment practices must be pursued to support county needs. Counties also need greater flexibility in raising revenue. The LWVOK supports legislation permitting an increase in the millage levy for counties. County treasurers

should be required to invest county funds in interest-bearing accounts for highest and best use of the funds. Un-earmarking the transfer funds used for road maintenance would better serve the entire county. Annual unscheduled audits of county funds should be conducted.

The LWVOK does not believe a separate code of ethics for county officers is needed. The current oath of office, if enforced, is sufficient. The oath could be strengthened by inclusion of stronger penalties for violation and a requirement for disclosure of any conflict of interest.

Consensus Approved 1983

BACKGROUND

The LWVOK, at its 1981 Convention, received a request from the delegates for approval and coordination assistance from the State Board for a statewide ad hoc committee to develop a program study on county government. The decision was well timed; it was that year a county commission scandal erupted, focusing attention once more on the need for modernization to insure better government at the county level.

At the 1982 LWVOK Council, the actual study of county government was adopted and resulted in the consensus that was approved at the 1983 convention.

In the years since federal prosecutors sent commissioners in nearly all counties to prison, little actual reform in county government has taken place. Public interest in and attention to the operations of county government faded in the wake of Oklahoma's fiscal problems of the 1980's. The Oklahoma Legislature did enact some cosmetic changes regarding purchasing procedures as well as accounting practices to provide a better paper trail in tracking money spent by county officials. Commissioners were also encouraged to make better use of the open meeting law in conducting business.

Information received from the U.S. Attorney in 1989 shows that states adopting systems similar to home rule have reported considerable savings and increased efficiency. Suppliers who serve northern Oklahoma and Kansas report more corrupt business practices in Oklahoma than in Kansas.

Any significant modernization or reform of county government is still waiting.

GOOD GOVERNMENT

Support for the basics of good government

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that government should be representative, responsive, efficient, flexible, and accountable. The structure of government should be flexible enough to provide for increasing and changing needs. Close coordination of government at all levels is desirable. Overlapping of functions and duplication of services should be eliminated.

Government should guarantee every citizen:

- Equal access to legislative and administrative processes,
- Equal and adequate service, equitably financed, and
- Geographic as well as at-large representation.

The structure of government should:

- separate legislative and administrative functions and establish an effective set of checks and balances between the two,
- vest final responsibility in a chief executive to assure priority setting, long-range planning, and coordination of departments,
- provide for a merit system for government employees, and
- provide for the initiative, the referendum, and the recall of public officials.

BACKGROUND

The League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa (LWVMT) adopted this position in the 1960's and has used it most recently to take positions on proposed changes to the City of Tulsa charter. In the discussion preceding the vote on this issue, concern was expressed over the fact that there is no mention of the judiciary in this description. Although there was general agreement that the statement might be revised at some future time, the position was adopted by concurrence by the LWVOK at its June 6, 2015 Convention.

Adopted by Concurrence 2015

INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING (IRV) OR RANKED CHOICE VOTING (RCV)

Support for legislation that assures that the candidate preferred by a majority of voters wins the election

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) has determined that the following criteria are important to them in an election system:

- The system encourages majority rule and ensures majority support for the winner.
- The election system is easy to understand, use and administer.
- The system minimizes the cost to the candidates and the city, county or state. It encourages minority (racial, gender, economic) participation.
- The system raises the level of political campaigns/ focus on the issues

The LWVOK found that the plurality system was easiest to understand and administer. However, they did not want a system where officials were not elected by a majority. They preferred some sort of a runoff system even if it were more expensive.

The two-round runoff was also easy to understand. However, it costs the candidates and the election administrators extra money. Because the runoff usually has a much lower turnout than the first primary, sometimes the winner of the runoff cannot be said to have won by a majority. Comparing the votes by county, some counties with runoffs for legislative seats had a greater than 50% decrease in turnout in the August primary runoff compared to the July primary.

Using IRV, a candidate must receive a majority to win. Since the runoff election is held at the same time as the first election, the candidates and the election administrators save the cost of a second election. Voters appreciate that they can vote their first choice candidate in a multi-candidate election and not worry about “spoiling” the chances of their second choice, since that vote will be counted in the second round if no candidate gets a majority in the first round.

The first thing most critics say of IRV is that the ballot is harder to mark than that for plurality voting, in which the voter just makes one ‘X’ or some equivalent one step process. (IRV offers voters the option of ‘ranking’ the candidates, but does not require it.) Any ballot that asks more of the voter than the one step can be problematic. The IRV is also more administratively complex. On the other hand, San Francisco State University -- which has done research with San Francisco’s IRV elections -- found that minorities and those whose first language was not English did not have more trouble than non- minority populations. All groups benefited from ballot education. San Francisco has used IRV since 2004 and election administrators and most voters support the system. The system was successful enough in San Francisco that the neighboring cities of Oakland and Berkeley have also started using IRV for their city elections.

IRV would require changes in state statutes and city charters. League members reviewed state election statutes and found nothing that prohibited instant runoff elections. Their review concludes that while there is nothing in current law that prohibits the use of instant runoff voting (or rank voting) from being used, it is not likely to be used unless the law (O.S. 26 Sections 1-102.2 and 1-102.3) is amended to include instant runoff/ranked voting as an option.

After looking at plurality, two round runoffs and IRV local Leagues agreed that IRV should be used in Oklahoma for the November state-wide elections, state-wide partisan primary elections and local elections for city officials and school boards.

Concurrence approved 2012

BACKGROUND

In 2009-2012 a study was carried out to determine if instant runoff voting (IRV), also called ranked choice voting (RCV), would be a good system for Oklahoma's partisan primaries and statewide general elections, as well as for local city and school board elections.

The study looked at instant runoff voting systems both as proposed and as actually used in other states and cities. A comparison of IRV was made to Oklahoma's current systems for both local and statewide races. Topics covered were the effects of IRV on cost, voter turnout, and fairness. The possibility of voter confusion and need for education for a new system were also considered. The effects on third parties and independent candidates were also discussed.

The study also looked at what would be required to change the system and how difficult that would be — city code or charter changes, ordinance changes, constitution changes, state law changes.

At the time of the study, Oklahoma used a combination of a plurality system and a two-round runoff system for elections. In a plurality system the candidate with the most votes wins whether or not he/ she receives a majority of the votes cast. With a two-round runoff if no candidate receives over 50% of the vote a runoff is held between the two candidates who received the most votes in the earlier primary. Many local school board and city elections use this two round system to elect officials. Some cities use a plurality system to elect city officials.

With IRV, sometimes called ranked choice voting (RCV), voters rank the candidates on the ballot, marking their first, second, and third choices, depending on how many candidates are in the race. In round one, the first-choice votes are counted. If a candidate gets over 50% of the votes (a majority), he or she is declared the winner. If no one has a majority, the instant runoff procedure is triggered. The candidate with the lowest number of first-choice votes is eliminated. The second place votes on the ballots of the eliminated candidate are added to the first place votes of the remaining candidates. If one of the remaining candidates gets a majority the election is over. If no one gets a majority, again the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and third

choice votes of the eliminated candidate are transferred to the remaining candidates. This continues until a candidate has a majority.

NATURAL RESOURCES

WATER

Support for state policies and procedures, which promote comprehensive long-range planning for conservation and development of water resources

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that water is a life-sustaining resource and that access to water is a basic human right.

The LWVOK believes that water belongs to the people and that Oklahoma laws must be based on and reflect that status. We oppose the concept of strict adherence to private ownership of water (riparian rights) because it contradicts these principles.

Comprehensive water planning and management is essential to the optimal use of the state's water resources and must include coordination among federal, state and local agencies. Such planning and management must balance the needs of each locality/area within the state with statewide and regional interests. At each level, procedures should allow for citizen participation in policy decisions affecting water quality, collection, and dispersal.

Both water quality and quantity must be safeguarded. Water conservation should be the primary method of ensuring adequate water for present and future needs. Pollution of water resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health.

Water regulations currently in place should be strictly enforced and agencies or entities given responsibility for the regulatory process should be funded to a level that reflects the intent of the laws upon which the regulations are based. A combination of incentives and punishments should be used in a manner that deters or reinforces the targeted behavior effectively.

The LWVOK supports:

- full disclosure of all chemicals used in any process that affects the quality of water to the appropriate government agency and urges that access to this information be made available to the public,
- continued education at all levels on the importance of water conservation, quality and availability, and
- on-going long-term planning efforts regarding water resources, watersheds and infrastructure.

BACKGROUND

Although the League of Women Voters of the United States reached a position on water in 1958 and updated and revised it in 1960, delegates to the LWVOK Council in 1978 found that they shared a deep concern about the quality and quantity of water in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma City League had planned a water workshop in late June to be called "Oklahoma Water, Supply and Demand." It was decided to seek funding and expand this workshop to include the whole state. Funding in the form of a mini-grant of \$100 was received from the LWVUS Education Fund, and the workshop was held June 22, 1978.

During the afternoon, "unit meetings" of League participants had discussion and arrived at consensus. This consensus was sent to local Leagues for their review and concurrence. Concurrence was approved by the LWVOK Board in January 1979.

In 1985, recognizing the importance and urgency of environmental issues, The LWVOK Board created the environmental quality portfolio. The portfolio covered a wide spectrum of environmental issues, in addition to water. Most of the issues are addressed in national League positions. They include state and local solid waste management, including solid waste disposal reform; recycling and regional planning; hazardous waste disposal reform and minimization of toxic waste; reduction of point and non-point sources of contamination to both surface and ground water; maintenance of quality drinking water, and the diversion of water to out-of-state sites.

In 1989, through grants from the LWVOK Citizens Education Fund and the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation, the League published *Oklahoma's Drinking Water*. Among the topics addressed in the book are natural factors that affect the quality of drinking water sources, how public water systems operate, the role of the regulatory agencies, contamination by pollution, and the impact of federal regulations. A key concern noted was the ability of small public water systems to bear the burden of additional treatment and testing imposed under the 1989 Federal Safe Drinking Water Amendments. This was of special interest since 90 percent of Oklahoma's 2583 public water systems serve populations of less than 3,300 people. *Oklahoma's Drinking Water* was cited by the Director of the Office of Drinking Water for EPA as "a good reference for study".

In March 1991, Linda Walker (LWV-Bartlesville, principal author of *Oklahoma's Drinking Water* and LWVOK Environmental Chair) and Cheri Ezzell (LWV-Enid) were presenters at an LWVUS Groundwater Education Workshop in Washington, D. C. That fall, based on an application developed by Ezzell, The League of Women Voters of Enid received funding from the EPA and the LWVUS Education Fund to implement a groundwater protection program for the City of Enid.

In 1991, the passage of SB 518 amended its anti-corporate farming law, allowing foreign and corporate ownership of agricultural land. In 1993, the "Right to Farm" law (SB 147) was passed. This bill protected licensed concentrated animal feeding

operations against law suits from residents who lived three miles or more outside an incorporated city limit and had fewer than ten occupied homes per square mile. After the passage of these bills, corporate hog and chicken farming flourished in Oklahoma.

The primary environmental focus for the LWVOK during 1991 and 1992 was to support efforts to consolidate and streamline state environmental organizations. Under HB 2227 (enacted during the 1992 session and effective July 1, 1993) Oklahoma has a fully functional Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) that is responsible for the principal environmental regulatory functions of air quality, water quality, and solid and hazardous wastes. Per HB 2227, DEQ is overseen by a 13-member citizen board with expertise in environmental regulatory areas. Advisory boards in the various regulatory areas, assist the Environmental Quality Board in rule making. A standard complaint tracking system was also established under the new legislation. Linda Walker (LWV-Bartlesville) was named to the DEQ Board and 1991-1993 LWVOK President Kathy Hinkle (LWV-Tulsa) was named to the Air Quality Council, one of the DEQ advisory boards.

HB 2227 was an attempt to consolidate environmental regulation into one agency. However, in the next legislative session, regulation of all agricultural operations was returned to the Department of Agriculture. Regulation of the oil and gas industry was returned to the Corporation Commission. In fact, there are still several agencies involved in environmental regulation and issuing permits.

HB 1522 was enacted in 1997 in an attempt to regulate the hog industry. SB 1170 and SB 1175 were passed in 1998 to add additional regulations to the hog industry and to regulate the chicken industry for the first time. These measures are good first steps toward regulation of these industries, but they still fall short of being environmentally protective.

At its 2011 state convention, the LWVOK authorized a restudy of the water position that had been last revised in 1998. The stated purpose of that restudy was to update the current (incomplete) LWVOK position on water so that it is aligned with the LWVUS position on water resources and is pertinent to the unique issues of water use, management, ownership and quality as they exist in Oklahoma. The study would potentially investigate and cover major watersheds and aquifers in the state of Oklahoma, current water use and potential future needs for water in the state, water ownership and sale of water rights and other issues that may arise during the course of the study.

Early meetings of the committee focused on water law and were attended at times by Gary Allison, University of Tulsa law professor and expert on Oklahoma water law. The Committee established a timeline and determined what areas of focus should be included in the study.

A meeting was held in Stroud in June 2012 to better define the study action plan. The following areas of concern were identified relative to the existing League of Women Voters of Oklahoma position on water:

- inadequate language for major law concerns,
- inadequate public financing of water infrastructure,
- no position on fracking,
- necessity for adequate legal and agency personnel for enforcement purposes,
- point and non-point pollution penalties and enforcement,
- need for consistent definitions, and
- existing method for handling complaints and protecting the public.

Research assignments were made and future meetings revolved around reporting on and digesting the research. Additional meetings were held in Stillwater and Tulsa. The consensus topics were determined to be as follows:

- water availability,
- water conservation,
- water quality,
- fracking, and
- funding, enforcement and legal implications of water in Oklahoma

Consensus questions for each topic were developed and submitted to the LWVOK Board for approval in at the September 2012 Board meeting prior to distribution to state Leagues for the consensus process. A study guide was developed including articles and reference sources for each topic. Materials were distributed to the local Leagues on October 15, 2012. The deadline for completion of the consensus process was March 15, 2013.

Consensus reports were received from League chapters in Norman, Stillwater, Tulsa and Lawton. A spreadsheet was developed with all of the responses to the consensus questions and this was distributed to all committee members for review. A committee meeting was held in Tulsa on May 19, 2013 to tackle drafting a new position on water. That draft was distributed by email to the committee for final comment, amended based on those comments, and the final position was agreed on.

SOCIAL POLICY

CORRECTIONS SYSTEM

Support for an improved Oklahoma penal system

Laws, Agencies and Institutions: The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that the present correctional system of Oklahoma is inadequate and should be improved. The LWVOK believes that the following standards should be implemented:

- All administrative officers in the Department of Corrections should be required to have at least a degree in the behavioral sciences and experience in corrections. The “experience equivalent” clause should be deleted from the present statutes that establish the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.
- The Division of Inspection should be implemented under the Department of Corrections.
- A pre-sentence investigation should be required for every convicted felon.
- A centrally located diagnostic facility, staffed with professionally qualified personnel, should be established near a metropolitan area that can provide readily available expertise. The proper placement or assignment of convicted felons based on professional evaluation should be made from this facility.
- A centralized prisoner record system should be established, either at the diagnostic center or the Department of Corrections, where records would not be available to prisoners.

The State institutional facilities should include the following:

- one maximum-security facility for the state with the prisoner population limited to not more than 500,
- more medium-security facilities, limited in size and near metropolitan areas;
- more community treatment centers established as minimum security facilities, and
- more training and education programs for medium and minimum-security inmates.

The LWVOK supports utilization of community rehabilitation measures as an effective means to decrease the present system of centralized imprisonment.

Consensus approved 1975

Sentencing: The LWVOK believes that the primary purpose of imposing criminal sanctions is for the protection of the public. Rehabilitation is one means of achieving this purpose.

Sentences should be uniform throughout the state; there should be no gross disparity between sentences imposed for the same kind of crime. Sentences should be fair, provide certainty for the convicted, and be tied in a reasonable way to the crime. Sentencing for criminal acts should be determined by judges instead of by juries.

Sentences imposed should be within specific guidelines established by the legislature or by a sentencing commission. Judges should be accountable for imposing sentences within the guidelines.

The LWVOK believes that any felony limits established should be reviewed and updated periodically.

Sentencing other than imprisonment should play a major role in the criminal justice system. A wide variety of alternative sentences closely tied to community resources and involvement should be used. Because they are most effective in economic and human terms for the protection of society, alternatives to incarceration must be an integral part of the sentencing process.

The community has the responsibility to be involved at all stages of the criminal justice system -- study, planning, education and policy-making -- and should provide support for a sound restitution program, reintegration of violators into community life, and prevention programs.

Consensus approved 1979

Parole: The LWVOK supports the creation of a State Pardon and Parole Board composed of three to five full time members. The LWVOK believes the Board should be the sole authority for the granting of paroles with the governor removed from any involvement in the parole granting process. Qualification requirements for Board members should include personal qualifications and integrity consistent with those expected of high judicial officers who command the trust and respect of the public. Educational requirements should be those that qualify the individual for professional status in such fields as criminology, education, psychology and other social sciences. Board members should also have experience in many fields of corrections that enable them to understand intimately the problems confronting both offenders and correctional officials. No member of the Pardon and Parole Board should be an officer of any political party or seek to hold elective office while a member of the Board. Members should serve staggered terms. The LWVOK believes that the method of appointing members of the Pardon and Parole Board should minimize partisan politics in the parole process.

An individualized parole plan based on uniform criteria should be developed for each inmate entering the prison system. The criteria should be clearly defined. A standard procedure should be developed for a systematic review of each inmate, and inmates should be provided with counseling periodically on their progress toward meeting the requirements of the parole plan. All parole investigations and reports should be done by professionally qualified personnel.

Prison rules and regulations should be clear, reasonable, and well defined. Every effort needs to be made to ensure prisoners understand the rules. Good time should be vested with maximum limits set on the amount lost per infraction. In disciplinary action, due process must be protected. An ombudsman system should be established.

Parole officers should be professionally qualified and have reasonable caseloads. Rules and the period of supervision for parolees should be individualized and realistic.

Services need to be offered to bridge the gap between the institution and society.

The LWVOK believes that procedures for revoking parole should ensure that parolees are entitled to minimum requirements of due process. Parolees should have legal counsel and the right to subpoena witnesses.

Consensus approved in 1979

BACKGROUND

The LWVOK adopted the Oklahoma correctional system as a study in the spring of 1973 which proved timely as a major riot at McAlester state prison that summer focused state attention on the need for reform of Oklahoma prisons. The Legislature, prodded by the report of a special task force committee that investigated the riot, moved the state forward, improving the correctional system. However, the most significant development in correctional reform came, not from the actions by the Legislature or the executive branch, but from the judiciary in the form of a court order by U. S. District Judge Luther Bohanon. His orders to correct discrimination and unlawful actions mandated changes in these areas:

- racial discrimination in cell and job assignment,
- harsh disciplinary actions,
- harsh confinement and lack of exercise,
- use of chemical agents,
- meals,
- medical care,
- correspondence and subscriptions to publications,
- access to courts and legal books,
- religious freedom, and
- security and staffing.

Both the post-riot Legislative Task Force and the Master Plan for Oklahoma Corrections gave top priority to reduction of the inmate population through the use of alternatives to incarceration. This has not taken place.

Upon completion of two documents (*Laws, Agencies and Institutions* and *The Parole System in Oklahoma*) the LWVOK realized that other changes were needed. This led to the adoption at the 1977 Convention of a further study of parole and a new study of sentencing.

The LWVOK continues to address these issues:

- prison overcrowding,
- alternatives to incarceration,
- over incarceration,
- disproportionate incarceration of women and minorities,
- training and education programs,
- under-utilization of parole,
- large-scale early releases and emergency releases,
- specialized treatment of categories of offenders such as drunk drivers and sex offenders,
- sentencing reform,
- siting of community treatment centers,
- full-time Pardon and Parole Board,
- community involvement, and
- education of the public on criminal justice issues.

Several League positions have been accomplished:

- All administrative officers in the Department of Corrections are required to have at least a degree in the behavioral sciences and experience in criminology. The “experience equivalent” clause has been deleted from the present statutes that establish the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.
- The Division of Inspection has been implemented under the Department of Corrections.
- A centrally located diagnostic facility, staffed with professionally qualified personnel, has been established at the Lexington facility. The proper placement or assignment of convicted felons, based on professional evaluation, is made from this facility.
- A centralized prisoner record system has been established.
- An individualized parole plan based on uniform criteria is developed for each inmate entering the prison system.
- All counties now have the option to use community service sentencing for offenders remaining in their home communities and making restitution.

The state added two new institutions in 1988 – one for women and one for young male offenders, and in 1990 added 350 more beds to the maximum-security facility at McAlester. However, overcrowding continues to be a major problem. The riot at Mack Alford Correction Center in Stringtown in 1988 was caused by overcrowding.

The programs offered by the Department of Corrections are excellent, but access is curtailed by unpredictable discharge dates and the heavy use of the early release programs caused by overcrowding.

Although the 1990 Legislature appropriated funds to staff three work camps, no funds are available to construct the work camps. Capital improvements are currently on hold with no new money appropriated for emergency repairs.

In 1988, a Criminal Justice System Task Force was appointed by the Governor to examine ways to reduce prison overcrowding. One member of the 18-member task force was a League member who held the Corrections Portfolio for several years.

Task force recommendations led to creation of two important committees: 1) Recodification of the Criminal Code Committee and 2) Sentencing and Release Policy Committee. Final recommendations were due by March 1992.

Rates of imprisonment for the United States and the State of Oklahoma began to climb in the mid-1970s and show no sign of a decline. In 1993, Oklahoma was the state with the highest rate for incarceration of women and had the fourth highest incarceration rate for men. There were over 12,000 people serving sentences in correctional facilities in Oklahoma with 57.6% for non-violent crimes and 42.4% for violent crimes. The average sentence was 15 years; however, average time served was only 20 months. Individuals convicted of drug offenses, at 23%, constituted the fastest growing category of new receptions.

Due to increasing demand on the system and lack of resources to build new prisons, SB 565 (Prison Population Management Act) was passed in 1993. The Act provided for a system of supervised release when the population of the prison system exceeded 97.5% of capacity.

Only non-violent offenders within 24 months of qualifying for parole were eligible for release. The prisoner had to complete the required rehabilitation, education, or substance abuse program for her/his case. SB 565 also required active community supervision for inmates participating in the program. Although this bill was passed in 1993, by spring of 1994, the law had been challenged by public opinion and a court case.

As of 1996, there appeared to be both public and legislative momentum to plan comprehensive sentencing reform. Various reform groups in steering committees worked to write a balanced reform bill that focused on the need for truth in sentencing (and hence an end to early release) and to design alternative punishments that would be rehabilitative in nature, but would have sufficient safeguards to protect the public. The bill, HB 1213, called the Truth-in-Sentencing and Community Corrections Act, addressed both problems in exhaustive detail. It passed with nearly a unanimous vote and was signed by the Governor at the end of the 1996 session.

As of 1999, the legislature had delayed implementation of HB 1213, had not funded any county to provide community services, and was unsure of the fate of the sentencing

guidelines. At the same time, prison crowding was worse than ever with 20,000 in custody. Conditions in the institutions were deteriorating especially in the areas of medical services, mental health services, and staff retention. There was decreasing commitment to the importance of family visitation, educational programs, and the need to prepare inmates for successful release into their communities. There was increasing commitment to the use of private prisons that charge more per diem, and while clean, new, and safe, do not provide much prisoner education or training.

REINTEGRATION OF FEMALE OFFENDERS

Support for the successful reintegration of female offenders

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that addressing the basic needs of women who are released from prison can reduce the rate of recidivism and contribute to restoring these women to productive citizenship. These needs include the restoration of voting rights, housing, medical care and employment.

Voting rights should be restored as soon as a woman leaves prison. The current system of restoring voting rights only after the full original judgment and sentence is completed is confusing. As soon as someone leaves prison, that person should be eligible to vote.

Title VIII public housing requires that tenants who have had a conviction for either drugs or violent behavior within the preceding three years show evidence of completion of a course in either substance abuse or anger management. The Department of Corrections needs to insure that such courses are available to female prisoners before they are released. The Department of Corrections should assist female offenders in obtaining information necessary to get housing, health care, and employment before they are released.

Female prisoners should have access to adequate health care while they are incarcerated. They should be provided with a clear record of all medical treatment they have received when they are released. The Department of Corrections should assist prisoners to be released with information that will assist them in continuing to receive health care after they have been released. As access to dental care is the most difficult to obtain upon release, the Department of Corrections should recommend what is necessary to see that funding for this is available.

The Department of Corrections should provide programs that improve female prisoners job skills. The legislature should be educated in the importance of such programs to ensure that they are properly funded. Prior to their release from prison, women should be guided toward viable job possibilities and assisted in finding solutions to problems such as transportation to a job. Upon release from prison, transportation to work becomes an issue, and the LWVOK should work in the community to create innovative ways to meet these needs.

Consensus approved 2007

BACKGROUND

Recognizing that Oklahoma has a high rate of female incarceration, the LWVOK began a two-year study of the issue in 2005. The study focused on the barriers that women faced when they left prison. Four basic barriers were identified: the restoration of voting rights, housing, medical care and employment.

The study was designed to suggest ways of overcoming these barriers rather than simply identifying them. Much of the responsibility for overcoming these barriers fell to the Department of Corrections. However, following the example of the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa, the LWVOK recommended that Leagues in other areas of the state develop similar directories of local services available. These directories would be provided to the Department of Corrections to be given to women who were leaving prison as a means to assist them in their reintegration efforts.

The LWVOK also promised to assist the Department of Corrections in achieving its goal of successful reintegration of female offenders by making the legislature aware of the importance of job training and by keeping directories of services up to date.

The directories developed by members of the LWVOK eventually became a resource known as the 211 service hotline. It was sometimes referred to as the heartline. It was a phone number for locating service providers in a variety of different areas.

DRUG POLICY

Support for a sensible policy regarding drug use in Oklahoma

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that drug use should be considered a public health issue when it involves drug users, including people with severe substance use disorders (addicts), their families, and their communities. However, it becomes a criminal issue when it involves large-scale manufacturing, sale, and distribution of drugs under illegal conditions.

Methadone, suboxone, and other medications have proven effective in helping many people recover from severe substance use disorders (addiction). The LWVOK believes that drugs like these should be made available under medical supervision to anyone who can benefit from them, including inmates of jails and prisons.

The LWVOK believes that public health organizations should sponsor needle exchanges when health professionals recommend their use. This promotes the health and safety of drug users and promotes safe neighborhoods.

The LWVOK supports the development and funding of the following programs which should be beneficial in preventing the use of harmful drugs:

- educational programs, at schools and other venues, that inform people about the effects of drug use, particularly programs for parents and other caretakers and for children of any age who may be at risk,
- community mental health programs,
- the identification of groups at risk for drug use, and programs to assist these groups, including mentoring,
- programs, such as theater, music, art, and sports, that give young people alternatives to taking drugs, and
- programs to help communities develop economically and alleviate poverty.

People with substance use disorders are often socially isolated from their communities. This is especially the case if they have been imprisoned. Services, such as mentoring and job training, should be offered to people in jails and prisons. The LWVOK recommends development of the following supportive services to help these people become functioning and productive members of their communities:

- mentoring,
- job training,
- finding employment, including the use of individuals who act as bridges to potential employers,
- locating housing,
- receiving medical and dental care and health insurance, and
- designing community health programs to help remove stigma and stereotyping of people with substance use disorders.

The LWVOK supports the elimination of questions about criminal convictions on initial employment applications.

The LWVOK recommends that a drug be decriminalized when research indicates that the harm caused by prohibition of the drug is greater than the expected harm caused by decriminalization.

The LWVOK believes that a drug should be made legal for medical purposes if medical professionals deem that it has therapeutic benefits. Further, the League encourages research into the medical uses and effects of drugs.

The LWVOK advocates that the federal government should reclassify marijuana from Schedule One to a more accurate classification, thus facilitating research into its effects and uses.

The LWVOK believes that each state should decide whether or not it wants to legalize marijuana.

The LWVOK supports the decriminalization of marijuana.

The LWVOK believes that programs such as drug prevention, drug treatment, and community reintegration should receive full funding through taxes. The money saved by not arresting and imprisoning drug users should be rechanneled into treatment programs and other programs to support the reintegration of drug users into their communities.

Concurrence approved 2017

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the Stillwater League of Women Voters voted to undertake a local study on drug policies. The League had a compelling reason for doing so. One of the Stillwater League members had a son who, years earlier, had developed a dependency on an illegal drug and was caught up in the criminal justice system, eventually dying while incarcerated. A committee to study drug policy was formed, and the group never forgot that drug policies have a real and sometimes devastating effect on our friends, families, and communities across Oklahoma and the world.

The Drug Policy Study Group met for the first time in the summer of 2014. The committee took a broad approach, looking into various aspects of drug policy. Members carried out research, including a review of drug policy studies carried out by other state and local Leagues, and many speakers addressed the Stillwater League. The Committee completed its work in November of 2015, when the Stillwater League reached consensus on positions.

Drug policy is a controversial subject, and the positions adopted by the Stillwater League represent a middle ground among members. That is, the positions were acceptable to those who participated in the consensus meetings, although for some League members, they did not go far enough toward decriminalization or legalization of drugs.

As the committee worked, they soon came to the realization that the formulation of drug policy is a daunting task. There is a wide range of drugs available. In addition, actual drug use varies, from occasional recreational use by adults, to consumption driven by severe dependence. Furthermore, the kind of intervention that is most useful for one individual may not work for another.

The policies that the Stillwater League favors are similar to those favored by other Leagues, including LWV Hawai'i (2008) and LWV Charleston Area (2010), and they draw on information and recommendations from a number of organizations, including the American Medical Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Stillwater League supports policies that are effective and humane and that provide the greatest possible safety for drug users and the greater community.

The Stillwater League of Women Voters submitted the position they had adopted on drug use, as well as extensive background notes, to the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma at its March 24, 2017, meeting. The position was accepted and placed on the agenda of the 2017 Convention to be considered for concurrence. At the 2017 LWVOK Convention on June 3, the position was adopted by concurrence.

EDUCATION

Support for strengthened financial and administrative structures that would provide for quality education in Oklahoma

Education Finance: The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that improved financing is the key to providing equal opportunity for quality education for all children in Oklahoma. The LWVOK believes that the state should assume the major responsibility for financing common school education. The state should also assume the responsibility for improving and equalizing financial resources among the school districts. The major portion of financing for common schools should come from state funds, moving away from a base of ad valorem taxes. Overall tax reform must be achieved with continued improvement of assessment practices and the removal of constitutional limitations on millage.

Broad-based sources, such as income and sales taxes, should be considered in providing funds for education. The LWVOK supports mandatory kindergarten education for all children. School districts should be required to establish and provide a kindergarten program in which parents are required to enroll their children. The state legislature should continue to appropriate funds to finance kindergarten.

The LWVOK supports an expanded program of special education services, including those for gifted children. Early identification of children needing these services is essential. The LWVOK believes additional funding is necessary.

While recognizing the need for tax reform, the LWVOK will continue to support removal of loopholes in tax laws and exemption from property taxes, and the requirement that each school district vote the maximum millage. Consideration should be given to formulas for state aid other than Average Daily Attendance (ADA).

The LWVOK believes that improved financing, accountability of expenditures, and more efficient financial procedures are the keys to providing quality higher education in Oklahoma. The LWVOK believes that the state government should assume the major responsibility for financing state institutions of higher learning.

The system of education in Oklahoma should provide guidance to students so that they enter programs for which they are best suited. There should be continuing evaluation of duplicated high-cost specialized programs.

Administration of Higher Education: The LWVOK believes that the boards of higher education should be restructured to provide better governance of the system. The coordinating board, the State Board of Regents for Higher Education, should remain a constitutional board.

The LWVOK believes that career and technical education should be an important component of educational options. Counseling in career education should be emphasized and greater opportunities for youth and adults in career and technical education need to be provided.

Administration of Common Schools: The LWVOK believes that the state Superintendent of Public Instruction should be appointed. Whether appointed or elected, the members of the State Board of Education should be selected to represent population-based districts such as congressional districts.

The LWVOK supports the reorganization of school districts for quality education and continues to support equalized collection and distribution of ad valorem taxes.

Accountability: The LWVOK believes that any system of accountability must include: goal setting, citizen involvement, and evaluation. In a system of accountability, goals must be set and evaluation must be made to determine that the goals have been achieved. Citizen involvement is of prime importance in both goal setting and evaluation.

Consensus approved 1973

Textbook Selection: The LWVOK believes that the State Board of Education should maintain a statewide adoption process for the selection of textbooks but should not limit the approved items to any specific number—only approve or disapprove all submitted materials. The adoption process should have the flexibility to include both textbooks and other learning materials. The textbook should not be the sole source of information available for use in the classroom. Local school districts should be permitted to use state-appropriated textbook funds to purchase any learning materials appropriate to a course of study.

The LWVOK believes that the selection criteria used by the State Textbook Committee should be periodically evaluated. All redundant, obsolete, inappropriate, or insignificant items should be removed. The criteria should be evaluated in terms of objective treatment of subject matter, clarity, applicability, and usefulness to evaluators.

Teachers charged with the responsibility of selecting instructional materials at either the state or local level should be given adequate time free of other duties to accomplish the task. Selection committee members at both the state and local level should be trained to critically analyze materials in relation to the curriculum, accuracy of content, and appropriateness of method. Such training should be required, and could be provided through in-service opportunities and/or teacher education courses.

Selection committee members should be encouraged to use textbook evaluations prepared by professional organizations to assist in their selections. Results of field testing or pilot programs should also be considered in the selection of all instructional materials. Refusal to adopt a certain textbook or series should be accompanied by an explanation to the publisher of the reasons for that rejection.

Consensus approved 1986

Corporal Punishment: The LWVOK opposes corporal punishment in the public schools of Oklahoma. The LWVOK believes that the basic constitutional rights of all people, regardless of age, must be protected. The LWVOK feels that the most effective approaches to discipline in the public schools emphasize preventive, diagnostic, and remedial measures that help to instill self-respect in children and adolescents.

Concurrence approved 1989

BACKGROUND

Concern for the quality of education provided Oklahoma's children has been a thread running through LWVOK program positions for decades. The current education positions reflect the intense national interest in improving the equality of opportunity for quality education that arose in the 1970's. Oklahoma focused its attention on improving administrative structures and the manner in which education (both common and higher) was funded.

Early study and consensus called for mandatory kindergartens. The 33rd Legislature made kindergarten a reality with local districts offering free kindergartens by September 1, 1974. However, kindergartens were still not mandatory for all students. The LWVOK worked for expanded special education services for both the handicapped and the gifted and talented child. The 33rd Legislature made provision for the establishment of 250 new special education classes for the 1971-72 school year. The revised state aid formula established by the 39th Legislature also addressed the problem of increased costs for special education programs by weighting various categories of special education students. Programs for gifted and talented students were provided funding through this weighting system and were to be implemented over a three- year period beginning in the 1981-82 school year and completed by the 1983-84 school year.

The LWVOK addressed the use of both Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and Average Daily Membership (ADM) as a basis for determining state aid. This was a part of the new equalization formula that was established by the 39th Legislature to more equitably distribute funds to local school districts. However, since its inception the new formula has not been allowed to work as intended. The hold harmless clause, which was to protect districts from receiving less than they did the year before the new formula was adopted, has prevented the bulk of state aid from being applied according to the formula. The 41st Legislature adopted a phase-out of hold harmless funding to allow more state funds to funnel through the formula.

An additional roadblock to the funding formula is the number of line item appropriations that are not based on the formula. Although the number of these items has been reduced, a large amount of appropriated money is still not distributed based on the established criteria of the funding formula.

Study of career and technical education led the LWVOK to support expansion of such programs. Since the adoption of this position, the LWVOK has seen the legislature set up the mechanism for the formation, governance, and funding of area career and technical schools. Oklahoma now has one of the premier career and technical programs in the United States.

Other LWVOK positions have addressed textbook selection, the need for counseling programs in elementary grades, abolishing the office of County Superintendent of Schools, consolidation of some school districts, and smaller class size. The LWVOK also backed concepts set forth in legislation passed in the second session of the 39th Legislature, calling for more stringent qualifications for educators entering the profession and giving support for continuing in-service training. Much of what has been accomplished in the field of education in Oklahoma has had the active backing of the LWVOK.

Inequities in school funding, as they related to disparities in opportunity for quality education for Oklahoma school children, provided the driving force that directed the LWVOK to seek a change in the system of financing education. A LWVOK study examined the current system, based on a combination of local ad valorem taxes and state support, and concluded that changes needed to be made for the benefit of all the children in the state.

To achieve the reform, the LWVOK considered a lawsuit challenging the ad valorem tax system as practiced in Oklahoma that causes variation in assessment percentages among and within counties. The LWVOK participated as *amicus curiae* in a successful suit requiring the State Board of Equalization to fulfill its constitutional duty to equalize ad valorem taxes across the state.

The LWVOK also pursued action at the legislative level by giving support to efforts to create equalization in school funding. The citizen awareness campaign funded by the League of Women Voters Education Fund helped build support for the new system.

In the summer of 1989, Governor Henry Bellmon called a special session of the legislature to address problems in the state education system. The LWVOK was involved in extensive lobbying for the passage of HB 1017, the Education Reform and Funding Act of 1990. With the passage of HB 1017, several long-standing LWVOK education positions were implemented. Among LWVOK positions that became law were some dealing with the administration, structure, and the funding of the common education system.

This law mandates that all schools meet standards equal to or greater than those of the North Central Accrediting Association. Some of these standards include improved curriculum, better access to counselors, and class-size reduction. Failure to meet these standards will result in reorganization or consolidation of districts. This law also abolishes the office of County Superintendent of Schools and mandates half-day kindergarten.

The law that resulted from HB 1017 improved funding to Oklahoma's public school system by adding earmarked sales and income tax hikes to fund mandates of the law. This increase in funding gave an additional \$230 million to the public school system in the first year. Equity among districts has not yet been achieved. A constitutional amendment to implement the Common School Fund failed in the summer of 1990. The LWVOK continued to work for improved and equitable funding.

With the passage of HB 1017, Oklahoma took a giant step toward improving its system of public education. However, as soon as it was passed, an anti-tax movement started a petition to overturn the bill. The LWVOK continues to work to keep the reforms and funding provided by this landmark piece of legislation. By a vote in October 1991, HB 1017 was affirmed.

Delegates to the 1989 LWVOK Convention voted to adopt a position statement opposing the use of corporal punishment in the public schools. This new position was based on the belief that the basic constitutional rights of all people, regardless of age, must be protected. In the 1991 legislative session, a bill was introduced in the House to prohibit corporal punishment in public schools. The bill was not passed out of the House Education Committee.

In the summer of 1992, the LWVOK participated in a coalition that urged the State School Board to implement a two-year moratorium on corporal punishment in Oklahoma public schools. The Board voted unanimously to institute a moratorium. Because of the many concerns the Board received about local control, the Board stated that the moratorium was only a suggestion. During the following legislative session, several bills affirming the use of corporal punishment were introduced in the House and killed in the Senate.

Local Oklahoma Leagues have been successful in asking school districts to place moratoriums or bans on corporal punishment. This avoids the perception of a state mandate on local districts.

In 1992, the House and Senate joined in an interim study to recommend legislation on textbook reform to the 1993 legislature. The panel of educators and legislators returned with suggestions for legislation that were essentially recommendations made by the LWVOK following the 1986 textbook study. The bill was passed and the reforms were implemented.

EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Support for consistent core graduation requirements for all students

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) recommends that the legislature review the expansive core requirements in HB 2886 to allow for options in electives and options in meeting graduation requirements to reflect the values of the local district.

The LWVOK suggests that professional educators, legislators, and citizens work together to decide the core graduation requirements necessary for all Oklahoma students. The basic core requirements for high school graduation should emphasize:

- math, including the algebra course,
- science,
- government,
- economics,
- history, and
- language arts.

The LWVOK strongly suggests that all students complete these basic core requirements.

The LWVOK believes that the legislature should not mandate the individual class objectives of local districts or Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) objectives. PASS objectives should continue to be regulated by a committee of professional educators, classroom teachers and administrators. The objectives should be consistent in all classrooms throughout the state. PASS objectives for all courses required for graduation should continue to be available to the public.

The LWVOK suggests that local districts concentrate on offering a variety of electives that emphasize citizenship and the development of life skills.

The LWVOK believes that state or federal resources should be available to help school districts meet the mandates. The LWVOK suggests high schools look to higher education institutions, including community and junior colleges, as well as career and vocational schools to help meet the challenges of offering advanced courses and electives.

Consensus approved 2005

BACKGROUND

In 2001, the Stillwater League of Women Voters recommended a study on the curriculum offered at the secondary level of common schools. This was adopted at the 2001 LWVOK Convention. The study looked at the history of curriculum development in Oklahoma and the curriculum presently offered in high schools. The study focused on

mandates legislated by the state and federal governments and the curriculum concerns of school administrators.

The law resulting from HB 2886, which was passed in 2001, mandated the following requirements for high school graduation in Oklahoma:

- 3 units of mathematics, base level Algebra I;
- 3 units of science, base level Biology;
- 4 units of language arts,
- 3 units of social science, and
- 2 units of arts

Thus, 15 of the 23 units required for high school graduation are specified. Two years of a foreign language are not required, but are encouraged.

Course material is based on sets of competencies specified in the PASS objectives adopted by the State Board of Education in 2002. These PASS standards are available to the public.

In 2001, the federal government passed the *No Child Left Behind Act* which mandated tests to evaluate which students met educational standards and listed steps to be taken at schools where students' test scores did not meet standards.

It should be noted that 50.1% of Oklahoma's high school graduates went directly to a public college or university in Oklahoma. Of these, 36.65% took at least one remedial course. During high school, 39.5% of the students participated in career and technology programs.

Questionnaires were sent to school administrators in districts throughout the state to assess their concerns about curriculum. In addition, some school administrators were interviewed by LWVOK members. Sixty-four school administrators responded. The sample included high schools with student populations that ranged from 38 to 4000 and were located from the panhandle to the eastern border of the state. At least one private school responded.

From interviews, the LWVOK concluded that Oklahoma high schools have succeeded in meeting the graduation requirements mandated in HB 2886. The majority of the administrators agreed with the concept of the mandates, but a lack of flexibility was the over-arching concern of the school administrators about the legislated mandates.

The curriculum needed to be flexible enough to meet the needs of both college-bound and vocation-bound students. Flexibility in math requirements was a special concern, especially with the base Algebra I course.

There were also concerns about conflicts with art, music, agricultural classes, career tech, band, and other electives. A large percentage of administrators wanted more local control. However, others felt that, in some instances, state control might eliminate some

conflicts with the local school board.

Although administrators throughout the state believed that teachers did control the curriculum in their classes, it was found that teachers have input on the curriculum only after mandates and the PASS objectives were met.

SCHOOL BONDS

Support for proper, voter-approved school bonds

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) recommends that local support for school bond must:

- conform to all local and state legal mandates,
- reflect the needs of the school district through equity to all students,
- include community participation,
- provide information regarding the bond measures to the voters through various media, and
- incorporate methods for public accountability, sustainability, and transparency following successful passage of the bond measure.

Concurrence approved 2017

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa (LWVMT) voted to conduct a study on school bond elections. The study was motivated by the fact that the LWVMT was asked to support school bond proposals in the past but had been unable to do so because it had not studied the topic in depth. A study group was formed and essential questions were posed.

During the study, the LWVMT Education Bond study committee reviewed national, state and local League of Women Voters policies on school bonds. The committee learned that no other Oklahoma League had a policy on school bonds, but found that local Leagues in other states had taken a position on support for school bond requests. The committee also interviewed a number of individuals who had been involved in the school bond process. These included school administrators, school board members and law firms that had worked with school districts throughout the state developing education bond proposals, and Oklahoma's most widely contracted bond management firm.

Following acceptance by the LWVOK Board of Directors, the LWVMT Education Bond Position was presented at the 2017 Convention where it was approved unanimously.

FISCAL POLICY

Support for a sound fiscal policy in Oklahoma

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes a sound fiscal policy should be based on a budget process that includes both revenue and spending projections and priorities over a multi-year period. Such a budget process will ensure that sufficient revenue will be raised for the projected costs of essential government services and ensure fulfillment of the constitutional requirement for a balanced budget.

The LWVOK supports:

- requiring the Board of Equalization to provide one unified revenue estimate to be used for both executive and legislative budgeting,
- providing more diverse revenue sources for municipalities in the state constitution,
- stabilizing revenue, including:
 - statutory definition of the purposes of the Constitutional Reserve Fund (Rainy Day Fund),
 - setting savings targets in accord with the purpose of the fund and projected tax volatility, and
 - providing flexibility in setting the cap on the percentage of revenues to be deposited in the fund.

The LWVOK opposes any constitutional impediments to raising revenue as needed.

The LWVOK believes:

- Taxes should be progressive and not regressive. The burden of taxation should not fall unnecessarily on those least able to pay.
- Income and property taxes should be the primary sources of revenue with sales taxes, fees and charges playing a lesser role.
- No sales tax should be charged on food or on prescription drugs. If after careful consideration of other options, expanding sales taxes could be applied to more diverse revenue sources.
- Earmarks (dedicated funds) should be regularly reviewed by an impartial state commission with the results publicly reported.
- Corporate income tax should be maintained as an important revenue source. Combined corporate reporting should be mandated to avoid underreporting of Oklahoma revenue by multi-state corporations.
- There should be a regular review of the benefits and impacts of tax credits, exemptions and exclusions to be carried out by the Incentive Evaluation Commission, or similar state commission, working with the State Treasurer to report and make recommendations to the legislature and the public.
- Municipalities should not be limited to using only the revenue from sales taxes to support their activities.

- Core government services should be sufficiently funded in order to fulfill their mission. These services include:
 - public education,
 - public safety including corrections,
 - state courts,
 - public health including mental health,
 - child welfare,
 - transportation and highways,
 - elections, and
 - environmental protection.
- Property taxes on public service properties should be allocated to all school districts on an equitable basis, using a formula such as Average Daily Membership (ADM).
- There should be statewide distribution of gross production tax revenue with a requirement that the percentage dedicated to common schools be regularly evaluated.

As stated in the 1989 Fiscal Policy Study:

The LWVOK believes trusts and authorities should be more accountable.

The LWVOK also believes there should be a comprehensive study of the collection, allocation and administration of state revenues by a qualified, impartial committee financed by the state.

Property Tax Assessment Procedures: The LWVOK believes in the need for reforms in assessment procedures including support of appointment of county assessors and of measures that would bring about equalization of tax assessments among and within counties. County assessors should:

- have professional qualifications,
- be appointed by a board composed of a combination of local and county officials from a list certified by a state agency,
- be required to take training provided by the state, and
- follow prescribed uniform statewide assessment procedures.

The LWVOK believes the Oklahoma Tax Commission should have the authority to enforce the above assessment procedures and should conduct sales/ratio studies and make the information public.

The LWVOK recommends periodic re-evaluation either on a statewide or county basis, with provisions to keep appraisals at current market value.

Property Tax Exemption Reform: The LWVOK believes that all tax-exempt property should be evaluated regularly and the results should be made public record. The LWVOK favors exemptions on real property that afford relief to low-income families. The LWVOK believes that all tax exemptions on industrial trusts should be for a short period of time and should not be renewable. The LWVOK believes tax exemptions for

charitable, religious, and educational institutions should apply only to property used for such purposes. Any other property owned by such institutions should not be tax exempt. The LWVOK favors abolishing the personal property tax on household goods; however, as long as the tax is in effect, all household property, including that of renters, should be taxed.

Consensus approved 2017

BACKGROUND

LWVOK members began a study of Oklahoma fiscal policy in 1959 when it was adopted by Convention delegates. The 1960 study centered around the principles of taxation and an analysis of Oklahoma's tax structure as related to a good, basic tax structure. The practice of earmarking funds received particular attention. During 1961 and 1962, emphasis was placed on the study of assessment procedures and equalization of ad valorem taxes among counties. In 1963 and 1965, the LWVOK successfully supported legislation giving cities additional taxing powers. The 1968 booklet, *Understanding State Finance*, was published to update members.

A study of funding for common schools in Oklahoma reemphasized the effect of inequities in the administration of ad valorem taxes. In 1972, the LWVOK hired an attorney to test the Oklahoma procedure that causes variation in assessment percentages within and among counties. The suit was never filed because of the impact of the March 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in the *Rodrigues vs. San Antonio Independent School District* case. The court ruled that, although property tax systems need reform, education is not among the rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and reform is up to the state lawmakers.

In 1973, the LWVOK Convention delegates adopted "A Comparative Study of Ad Valorem Tax Systems" as the study item so that the LWVOK would be able to evaluate proposed changes. In March 1974, the LWVOK cosponsored a statewide workshop, "The Property Tax—Success or Failure in Paying for Education?" The booklet, *Ad Valorem Tax: Real or Unreal*, was published. The study examined practices and procedures for correcting inequities in the administration of property tax.

In April 1975, the State Supreme Court ruled that the State Board of Equalization must fulfill its constitutional duties and equalize ad valorem taxes across the state. A special assessment ratio study was made which established three categories for each county: agricultural, residential, and commercial/industrial property. Also, a 1981 Attorney General's opinion prohibited the Oklahoma Tax Commission from measuring equalization through use of a composite ratio. In June 1981, 62 counties were in violation of property tax standards mandated by the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

Another area of LWVOK concern has been the erosion of the property tax base due to the exemption of many properties from the tax rolls. The Attorney General ruled in 1979 that a tax exemption cannot be granted a public trust unless permission for such

exemption (charitable, religious, etc.) can be found within the framework of the Oklahoma Constitution. Tax exemptions other than for governmental entities are to be decided on a case-by-case basis. The opinion also held that the option to make payments of "sum in lieu of ad valorem taxes" is void. The opinion was upheld by the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

Although LWVOK has many positions relating to ad valorem taxes, it had been unable to act on various other "tax reform" measures considered by the legislature. Delegates to the 1979 and 1981 conventions adopted a study of the state tax structure that examined sources and allocation of revenue.

Through 1987, 1988, and 1989 ad valorem legislation continued to be closely monitored by the LWVOK. In order to be more effective, the LWVOK joined the Fair Ad Valorem Is Reform (FAIR) coalition as a means of having additional impact and influence. In 1988, major legislation was passed through a bipartisan effort for comprehensive changes in how the state assesses and taxes property. A part of that effort included a proposed constitutional amendment (SQ 614) to assess all property at 100% of its fair market value. A special election date was set but later rescinded by the legislature. The legislature again addressed ad valorem reform during the 1989 session and made a major commitment to the reform measures passed in 1988 by appropriating funds to begin implementing the new legislation.

The LWVOK position on Oklahoma's Fiscal Policy adopted in 1989 reflected the concerns with ad valorem taxes. The position emphasized the need for county assessors to be appointed and trained. The need for uniform procedures across the state was also emphasized. The position placed the responsibility for overseeing and reporting assessments with the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

In 1990, a LWVOK-supported amendment passed which allows municipalities to borrow money to purchase, construct, or improve public utilities without levying an additional tax. Also approved was an amendment allowing the legislature to permit cities and counties to grant tax exemptions and other tax relief for certain areas that are in economic decline. State Question 634 was supported by the LWVOK but defeated at the polls in 1990. It would have established a Common School Fund which would receive monies from gross production taxes, a portion of the vehicle license fees, and ad valorem taxes on public service, commercial/industrial and real property valued above \$500,000.

In 1992, the LWVOK opposed SQ 640 that would require that all revenue increases be approved by three-fourths of both houses of the legislature or a vote of the people. The LWVOK believed that this violated the basic principle of representative government. Unfortunately, the amendment passed.

From 2004 through 2007 the legislature passed several bills that reduced Oklahoma's top income tax rate from 6.65% to 5.25%. Later, in 2014, the legislature reduced the top tax rate to 5.00% with possible further reductions to take place in the future because of a trigger mechanism based on revenue projections and estimates.

The impact of these tax cuts was reflected in the declining resources available to all state agencies. Corrections, Human Services and Education felt these reductions most deeply. The 2017 budget (\$6.8 billion) is significantly less than the 2007 budget (\$7.9 billion) even when the figures are adjusted for inflation. This loss of resources becomes more serious when one considers that over this 10-year period more individuals were being served and services were more expensive.

After years of forcing state agencies to economize to the point of eliminating core services, there is a growing realization that Oklahoma has a revenue problem. Unfortunately, the limitations placed on the Legislature as a result of SQ 640 and the language it added to the constitution have made it difficult to increase revenue. Instead of looking at increases in income and gross production tax rates, the two areas where increases would actually solve the budget crisis, the legislature has resorted to short-term measures that only prolong the problem.

JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Support for a modern, efficient court system accountable to the people

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes the appellate defense system in Oklahoma must be maintained at a level that guarantees all United States constitutional rights to defendants. In addition, the system should be adequately funded for indigent defense in each legislative budget. The money should be paid as a function of the executive branch at a level of appropriation that assures the Defender Division will operate in a timely, diligent, and efficient manner to carry out all of its responsibilities. The appellate defense system should rely on legislative appropriation to the executive branch for attorney fees for indigent defendants charged with first-degree murder. The LWVOK is opposed to the practice of paying attorneys from local court-generated fees or the state judicial fund.

The LWVOK does not support the state assuming the maintenance and utility expenses incurred by the district courts in each county courthouse.

The LWVOK believes that as a public policy body, the members of the Council on Judicial Complaints must be chosen in a manner guarantees that the council is independent of any political and special interest. The Council on Judicial Complaints should be accountable to the public by reporting the actual outcome of judicial complaints from the public, using objective criteria that protect privacy concerns yet adequately and fairly describe how each complaint was addressed.

The LWVOK believes in the merit selection of all the judiciary. As long as there are judicial elections in Oklahoma, there should be a means of accountability to the voters. Therefore, the state rules for conducting all judicial elections must encourage the widest

possible dissemination of information about the judicial system and the qualifications of judicial candidates. Information on judicial elections should be disseminated through the media. The LWVOK strongly endorses the objective evaluation of state judicial performance for purposes of public information.

The LWVOK favors alternative dispute resolution methods and their expanded use. The LWVOK encourages evaluation of the effect of these methods on citizen satisfaction, court caseload throughout the state system, and the increase or decrease in court-paid personnel.

The LWVOK opposes all appearances of female gender bias in the state courts, as evidenced by observable unequal treatment of female judges, attorneys and litigants, and measurable effects that preconceived biases about women have on court cases and the people involved. The LWVOK believes a survey study of female gender bias in Oklahoma courts should be conducted, with the state courts providing subsequent educational efforts for court personnel and judicial officials.

Consensus approved 1993

BACKGROUND

This position is the result of a 1992-1993 study of the structure and jurisdiction of the Oklahoma court system by a LWVOK judicial study committee that drafted an *Oklahoma Guide to the Courts* as part of its work. After the position was approved by consensus at the state convention in 1993, the LWVOK board established the judicial study committee as an action committee to examine possible legislation and court rules to implement the LWVOK position.

The committee recommended the following plan for Oklahoma:

- that state courts and the LWVOK jointly plan a statewide conference for 1994-95, to include the state judiciary and court personnel, law schools, bar association, state special interest groups, students, and law-related groups, that reflect broad demographics of the state;
- that some mechanism be built into the conference design that would continue the participation and enthusiasm engendered by the conference,
- that evaluation of the judiciary be developed within the administration of the courts instead of through the legislature, and
- that the Oklahoma Supreme Court undertake long-range strategic planning for the courts.

In 1994, the State Judicial Institute awarded the LWVOK Citizens Education Fund a grant of \$19,850 to conduct public meetings relating to state courts. The grant proposal called for an in-kind match by the Oklahoma state courts for \$21,050 for time and travel of the judiciary and court personnel at the meeting sites. Included in the grant were funds to print 1000 copies of the technical guide, *A Citizens' Guide to Oklahoma Courts*.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Support for an improved juvenile justice system

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that the Oklahoma juvenile system should:

- protect the basic constitutional rights of all parties,
- reduce recidivism among offenders,
- provide not only separation but also different treatment for delinquents, for dependent and neglected children, and for children in need of supervision;
- provide an adequate number of secure, local detention beds and regional treatment centers in order to ensure both appropriate treatment and protection of the public;
- provide strict and clearly defined consequences for serious criminal acts while preserving a system that has as its goal the teaching of responsible behavior rather than punishment, and
- emphasize positive motivation, self-respect, and respect for the rules of society.

The LWVOK believes that the juvenile justice system should serve the needs of the individual child by providing a wide range of placement options such as home placement, foster home care, and group homes. Institutions should serve as a last resort for those who need secure placement.

The LWVOK believes that early intervention, prevention, diagnostic, and remedial measures are crucial. Such services should be provided as early as possible to children and families with a demonstrated need for them. The school system should provide qualified personnel to identify emotional and physical problems and to provide remedial treatment as appropriate. Additional preventive measures might include family and youth counseling, recreational programs, and after school programs.

The LWVOK asks that coordination and cooperation between different parts of the system become priorities. Emphasis should be placed on solving or eliminating jurisdictional conflicts. Resources are limited, and children must be helped quickly if help is to be effective. If territorial attitudes or legal barriers cause fragmentation of services, it damages both the children who come into the system and the public safety.

The juvenile justice system should regularly evaluate programs based on results. Individual cases should be followed longitudinally and regular evaluations made of each child's progress. The LWVOK believes that these services should be adequately financed utilizing all public and private, national, state, and local resources.

The LWVOK believes the Oklahoma code for children can be improved by:

- greater insistence on the privacy of records and on the publication of opportunities and procedures for having records expunged,
- training in juvenile and family law for judges,

- a family court in each judicial district,
- special training for other personnel dealing with juveniles,
- strict and certain consequences for repeat and violent offenders,
- support for a reverse certification system for 16- and 17-year-olds who commit serious or violent offenses,
- individual certification process for younger offenders,
- consequences that are appropriate to the age of the child and the offense committed, and,
- requirements for professional assessment in every case including an analysis of the circumstances and nature of the crime, the age of the child, previous record, current circumstances, knowledge, maturity, and capacity for rehabilitation.

The LWVOK believes that the system of juvenile justice should be improved by:

- physically separating children by age group and classification (i.e. delinquent children, those in need of supervision, and dependent and neglected children),
- providing community-based temporary facilities such as shelters, foster homes, and group homes,
- providing community-based or regional-based facilities, both temporary and permanent, separate from adult jails and institutions for serious offenders;
- involving the parents in community-based programs with provisions for family guidance clinics, family courts, and parenting education;
- providing early diagnosis and counseling,
- providing long-term treatment in secure settings when needed,
- providing more and better-trained personnel,
- encouraging the use of volunteers as well as professionals in the juvenile justice system,
- providing adequate funding, and
- emphasizing positive youth development, positive role models and encouraging communities to protect young children and to provide guidance for adolescents.

Consensus approved 1994

BACKGROUND

The preface from the booklet *Juvenile Justice Part I* published by the LWVOK in 1976 stated "After the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma completed a two-year study of the Oklahoma Penal System in 1974, its attention was drawn to the rapid increase of crime among juveniles and the fact that so many juvenile offenders eventually come into the adult correctional processes and institutions." Therefore, a second study of the juvenile justice system in Oklahoma began in 1975. Due to the vast amount of information and study material required, it was felt that a two-year study would be necessary in order to gain proper insight into the process and its problems. At the same time, the legislature mandated formation of a Juvenile Law Task Force to study the total

juvenile justice system in Oklahoma.

The first year of the LWVOK study covered historical background and various juvenile codes, model acts, and procedures of juvenile justice systems with special emphasis on Oklahoma. Various recommendations were also considered. The second year of study emphasized juvenile institutions and agencies in Oklahoma and the effect of educational processes and procedures on juveniles.

A number of the recommendations in the consensus resulting from that study have been brought about. In 1977, legislation placed status offenders in a shelter or foster care rather than in a detention facility. The law resulting from HB 1468 authorized the Department of Human Services to increase community placement for juveniles. This resulted in the closing of three juvenile institutions in addition to one that had already been closed in 1981. The new law also provided for a wider range of placement options, emphasis on preventive measures, and increased protection of basic constitutional rights of children through required hearings. A new category called "Child in Need of Treatment" was established for children afflicted with emotional disorders to further provide for individualized treatment for all children.

In addition to changes brought about through enabling legislation, schools have continued to increase the number of qualified personnel to identify and provide remedial treatment for children with problems, and parenting classes have increased in number in both schools and agencies.

Throughout the decade of the '80s, agencies emphasized working within the existing family unit. Institutions were closed, but since the community-based treatment centers were never adequately funded, there was a loss of beds that was never resolved. This also created a loss of secure beds, making it easier for habitual offenders to manipulate the system to their advantage.

Most of the legislation written and passed in this area dealt with prevention and the at-risk child. Another major piece of legislation passed in 1987 provided funding for the Children's Trust Fund creating programs for preventing child abuse and neglect.

Oklahoma was one of five states with an established plan for the prevention of child abuse. The plan, developed by community volunteers, has served as a model for other states.

Removing all juveniles from jail was achieved in 1988. In that year, Oklahoma began to implement a statewide detention system adding five centers with a total of 42 beds. In 1990, plans were finalized for construction of a juvenile detention center in Cleveland County.

In 1989, HB 1021 authorized a comprehensive study of state-supported services to children and families in Oklahoma. One of the recommendations was the establishment of an Office of Planning and Coordination of Services to Children and Youth. The study provided expanded leadership opportunities for the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY).

In 1990, HB 1729 defined the expanded authority of the OCCY and directed that regional and district planning bodies be established in order to involve local communities in planning and coordinating services. The law resulting from HB 1729 also mandated the development of a statewide plan for serious habitual juvenile offenders.

According to the National Advisory Committee for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, serious habitual juvenile offenders comprised two to five percent of all juvenile offenders, but were responsible for more than half of all juvenile offenses. The statewide planning process for identification of and services for these juveniles utilized a comprehensive action plan model. This is a comprehensive and cooperative information and case management model that includes police, prosecutors, schools, probation and correction personnel, and social and community after-care services. Reports of juvenile crime are shared among the involved agencies. This serves two purposes: making a more comprehensive profile of individuals available and reducing the number of cases likely to slip through the cracks.

Responding to the increased public interest on this important issue, the LWVOK adopted a study update on juvenile justice at its 1993 Convention. A new position was adopted in time for the 1994 legislative session.

The 1994 session began with optimism toward passing a juvenile justice reform bill. However, the issue soon became embroiled in a budget controversy between the governor and legislative leadership. Nonetheless, at the end of the session, HB 2640 was passed but implementation was not scheduled until July 1, 1995. The bill resulted in the separation of juvenile justice responsibilities from the Department of Human Services and created a new and separate agency, the Office of Juvenile Affairs. This agency retained the mission of providing delinquency prevention and treatment services to juveniles, but added protection of the public from serious juvenile offenders and an expectation that juvenile offenders would be accountable for their behavior.

Methods to achieve these goals included the construction of additional secure treatment beds, an end to waiting periods for secure detention, and the Youthful Offender Act, which strengthened consequences and enabled the most serious offenders to be transferred into adult institutions after the age of 18 until age 22 if rehabilitation had not been achieved. Previously any 18-year-old offender had to be released upon turning 18 regardless of behavior while in custody.

Implementation of the Youthful Offender portion of the reform legislation was problematic and largely delayed due to overcrowding and classification problems in the adult system and inadequate funding for general corrections. However, there was better differential treatment due to an expanded network of therapeutic homes and a variety of service levels. There was more emphasis on analyzing and addressing racial imbalances in the custody population. Communication between the Department of Education and the Office of Juvenile Affairs improved because some problems are shared problems and require joint solutions.

LIVING WILL/ADVANCE DIRECTIVE

Support for the right of individuals to make or assign responsibility for their own end-of-life medical decisions

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that the living will should include:

- provisions for a durable power of attorney,
- no requirement for a terminal diagnosis prior to signing,
- no time limit on its validity,
- binding effect for individuals in a persistent unconscious state, and
- the right of individuals 18 or older to execute a living will.

The LWVOK believes that individuals' rights and wishes should be respected by health care professionals regarding their living will.

Consensus approved 1992

BACKGROUND

The LWVOK delegates to the 1991 Convention voted to study living wills and durable powers of attorney. The study began immediately in hopes a consensus could be reached and a position statement drafted before the 1992 legislative session.

Oklahoma enacted the Natural Death Act in 1985; however, it was very restrictive. It applied only to the "qualified patient" (a patient diagnosed and certified by two physicians to be in a terminal, irreversible, and incurable condition who would die regardless of life-sustaining procedures). If the patient was deemed a "qualified patient," the attending physician could honor a previously written directive, but was not bound by it.

In 1991, an interim legislative study reviewed previously introduced amendments to the Oklahoma Natural Death Act and similar legislation in other states. The LWVOK joined with other organizations to monitor legislative committee meetings discussing living wills. In October of 1991, the LWVOK began holding local consensus meetings. A consensus was reached, and a position statement was drafted in February of 1992.

With a position statement available, the LWVOK lobbied for passage of HB 1893, Oklahoma Rights of the Terminally Ill or Persistently Unconscious Act. The bill passed in the 1992 legislative session and included provisions stated in the LWVOK position. The LWVOK was recognized for being instrumental in the passage of this legislation.

MENTAL HEALTH

Support for improved delivery of mental health services and mental illness treatment

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that provision of mental health services in Oklahoma should be improved in the following ways:

- The state should undertake a basic mental health needs assessment of children, adults, elderly, homeless, and penal institution populations to serve as the basis for coordinated state and local planning to determine need for services.
- The assessment should include input from citizens as well as all providers and funding sources.
- The assessment should occur each decade or after any major revision in the structure of mental illness services such as the closing of Eastern State Hospital.

The state should focus on all aspects of identification and prevention of emotional problems, mental illness, and substance abuse. State funding should be provided for intervention and prevention programs in schools and child-care programs.

The state should increase funding for child mental health services and correct systemic payment issues which prevent any access to that care.

The state should monitor the effectiveness of mental health programs to ensure accountability and to translate these findings into better allocation of available funds.

The LWVOK believes that the delivery of services for mental illness and substance abuse in Oklahoma can be more effective. Therefore, the LWVOK recommends that the state of Oklahoma and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (DMHSA) undertake the following:

- developing a strategic state plan for treatment of illness based on epidemiological data that addresses all populations,
- funding for training personnel for delivery of services with placement based on the needs of a community,
- improving access to mental illness services,
- stopping the diversion of mentally ill children and adults into the corrections system, and
- increasing funding to the Oklahoma DMHSA especially to outpatient centers for mental illness and substance abuse.

Consensus approved 2002

BACKGROUND

Delegates to the 2001 LWVOK Convention adopted the study “Mental Illness and Delivery of Care in Oklahoma.”

The motion was in the form of a vote for concurrence to adopt a state position on mental illness and treatment in Oklahoma based on the position that League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa (LWVMT) had reached after an 18-month study on the topic.

The concurrence was passed and there was discussion by local League delegates on how the concurrence process could be extended to the local level. It was determined that each League would study the issue within its own community, and concur or revise the LWVMT position relative to its local circumstances. The LWVOK Board would then accept or reject the concurrence or revisions from the local Leagues.

The original timetable for concurrence by the local Leagues was to be prior to the 2002 Oklahoma legislative session so bills and lobbying on mental health issues could be developed. In the summer of 2001, the LWVMT mailed reference materials to each local League so it could examine the issue in relation to its own community.

Individual Leagues then created publicity and held a variety of meetings with community professionals, consumers of services, and families concerned with treatment services for various age groups. Because this process was lengthy and differed for each League, results were not available until March 2002. The LWVMT collected the responses from the local Leagues and members at large who were able to participate. The LWVMT Mental Health Study chair integrated all suggested revisions and additions to the position into one document. These results were reviewed and then accepted by the LWVOK Board at the March 2002 meeting allowing League members to advocate for mental health/illness issues during the remainder of the legislative session. The LWVOK is one of a few non-single-issue Oklahoma organizations to take a position on this issue.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION

Support for strategies to help reduce adolescent pregnancies in Oklahoma

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that many options or opportunities for lifestyles that stimulate self-sufficiency and self-esteem should be provided to help reduce adolescent pregnancies and births in Oklahoma.

In pursuit of this goal, the LWVOK recommends action to provide:

- better opportunities for obtaining good academic skills—emphasizing basic reading

- and math skills that create an incentive for learning and a desire to stay in school,
- more opportunities for jobs and training in work skills that teach good work habits and a good attitude toward work, as well as help to alleviate poverty;
- more training opportunities in family life education and life planning with emphasis on the responsibilities of being sexually active, parenting, and providing for the future;
- access for all teens to health services, including contraceptives and counseling on the responsibility of choosing whether or not to be sexually active; and
- resources for adolescents to help instill self-respect and an appreciation of their own capabilities and talents.

Consensus approved 1989

BACKGROUND

The LWVOK anticipated the public concern for this subject by initiating a state study on preventing teen pregnancy. A local League's summer program created so much interest that the 1987 convention adopted the topic, and local Leagues completed the study during 1988 with consensus being adopted in 1989. The study generated not only interest, but also a videotape program, *Teenage Pregnancy: A Path to Poverty*, that has been in demand by local Leagues and the public as well. It has been shown by civic organizations and schools across the state. In 1988, the Governor's Summit on Families, Children and Youth recommended the prevention of teen pregnancy as its number one priority.

As late as 1994, Oklahoma still did not have a consistent, statewide teen pregnancy prevention program. The State Department of Health had funded ten community-based prevention programs across the state. Several were located in League cities and were the result of local League advocacy efforts. During the 1994 legislative session, HB 1180 passed and the resulting law created the Interagency Coordinating Council on Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. The council identified effective strategies and programs, increased public awareness of the costs and consequences of teen pregnancy, and developed a blueprint for state and local action.

TRANSPORTATION

Support for an improved system of transportation for all

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that development of transit and transportation systems should be environmentally responsible and should provide adequate access to affordable transportation for all citizens. In order to reduce highway congestion, fuel consumption, and vehicular pollution, and to provide better access to housing, jobs, recreation and medical care, the LWVOK advocates the development and maintenance of energy- and time-efficient public transportation

systems within and between communities in Oklahoma and the region. Priority should be given to government-funded transportation projects that are directed toward better public access to fuel-efficient transportation and the reduction of single occupancy vehicles on the roadways.

The LWVOK also believes that the development of efficient and affordable transportation that links citizens across our state and neighboring states is important to the future of our state. The ability of children and adults in rural and urban areas to have the means to access needed services and to attend activities and community events is crucial in developing a sense of community in local areas and across our state.

Concurrence approved 2015

BACKGROUND

The League of Women Voters of Norman (LWVN) has included a statement on transportation since the adoption of its program positions during the 1960s. In 2007, the LWVN reaffirmed its statement on transportation. Affordable, efficient transportation for all our citizens is an integral part of current planning for the city of Norman, and for the city as a part of the larger metropolitan area of Oklahoma City. This position was adopted by concurrence at the 2015 LWVOK Convention.

A Summary of LWVUS Public Policy Positions

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive.

Voting Rights

Citizen's Right to Vote - Protect the right of all citizens to vote; encourage all citizens to vote.

DC Self-Government and Full Voting Representation - Secure for the citizens of the District of Columbia the rights of self-government and full voting representation in both houses of Congress.

Election Process

Apportionment - Support apportionment of congressional districts and elected legislative bodies at all levels of government based substantially on population.

Redistricting - Support redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote fair and effective representation at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for public participation.

Money in Politics - Campaign finance regulation should enhance political equality for all citizens, ensure transparency, protect representative democracy from distortion by big money, and combat corruption and undue influence in government. The League believes that campaign spending must be restricted but not banned. The League supports public financing, full disclosure, abolishing SuperPACs and creating an effective enforcement agency.

Selection of the President - Promote the election of the President and Vice-President by direct-popular-vote. Support uniform national voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections. Support efforts to provide voters with sufficient information about candidates.

Citizen Rights

Citizen's Right to Know/Citizen Participation - Protect the citizen's right to know and facilitate citizen participation in government decision-making).

Individual Liberties - Oppose major threats to basic constitutional rights.

Constitutional Amendment Proposals - In addition to League positions, consideration should be given to whether a proposal addresses matters of abiding importance, makes our political system more democratic or protects individual rights, could be achieved by less difficult legislative or political approaches, and is more suited to a constitutional and general approach than to a statutory and detailed approach

Constitutional Conventions - Concerned that there are many unresolved questions about a Constitutional Convention. Certain conditions must be in place: limited to a single specific topic, full transparency, delegates selected by population, and voting by delegates not by state.

Public Policy on Reproductive Choices - Protect the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

Congress and the Presidency

Congress - Support responsive legislative processes characterized by accountability, representativeness, decision making capability and effective performance.

The Presidency - Promote a dynamic balance of power between the executive and legislative branches within the framework set by the Constitution.

Privatization

Ensure transparency, accountability, positive community impact and preservation of the common good when considering the transfer of governmental services, assets and/or functions to the private sector.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Promote peace in an interdependent world by working cooperatively with other nations and strengthening international organizations.

United Nations

Support a strong, effective United Nations to promote international peace and security and to address the social, economic and humanitarian needs of all people.

Trade

Support U.S. trade policies that reduce trade barriers, expand international trade and advance the achievement of humanitarian, environmental and social goals.

U.S. Relations with Developing Countries

Promote U.S. policies that meet long-term social and economic needs of developing countries.

Arms Control

Reduce the risk of war through support of arms control measures.

Military Policy and Defense Spending

Work to limit reliance on military force. Examine defense spending in the context of total national needs.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest.

Natural Resources

Promote the management of natural resources as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems.

Resource Management

Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government.

Environmental Protection and Pollution Control

Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem with maximum protection of public health and the environment.

Air Quality - Promote measures to reduce pollution from mobile and stationary sources.

Energy - Support environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize energy conservation and encourage the use of renewable resources.

Land Use - Promote policies that manage land as a finite resource and that incorporate principles of stewardship.

Water Resources - Support measures to reduce pollution in order to protect surface water, groundwater and drinking water.

Waste Management - Promote policies that reduce the generation and promote the reuse and recycling of solid and hazardous wastes).

Nuclear Issues - Promote the maximum protection of public health and safety and the environment.

Public Participation

Promote public understanding and participation in decision making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources.

Agriculture Policy

Promote adequate supplies of food and fiber at reasonable prices to consumers and support economically viable farms, environmentally sound farm practices and increased reliance on the free market.

Federal Agriculture Policies - Provide financial support to subsidize agriculture in specific instances, enforce federal antitrust laws to ensure competitive agricultural markets and apply clean air and water regulations to all animal and aquaculture production. The federal government should fund basic agricultural research to provide adequate safety of our food supply.

SOCIAL POLICY

Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans.

Equality of Opportunity

Education, Employment and Housing - Support equal access to education, employment and housing.

Equal Rights - Support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and efforts to bring laws into compliance with the goals of the ERA.

Federal Role in Public Education

Support federal policies that provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-K through grade 12.

Fiscal Policy

Tax Policy - Support adequate and flexible funding of federal government programs through an equitable tax system that is progressive overall and that relies primarily on a broad-based income tax

Federal Deficit - Promote responsible deficit policies.

Funding of Entitlements - Support a federal role in providing mandatory, universal, old-age, survivors, disability and health insurance.

Health Care

Promote a health care system for the United States that provides access to a basic level of quality care for all U.S. residents, including behavioral health, and controls health care costs.

Immigration

Promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises; and provide for student visas. Ensure fair treatment under the law for all persons. In transition to a reformed system, support provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.

Meeting Basic Human Needs

Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

Income Assistance - Support income assistance programs, based on need, that provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing and shelter.

Support Services - Provide essential support services.

Housing Supply - Support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.

Child Care

Support programs and policies to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it.

Early Intervention for Children at Risk

Support policies and programs that promote the well-being, development and safety of all children.

Violence Prevention

Support violence prevention programs in communities.

Gun Control

Protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic weapons. Support regulation of firearms for consumer safety.

Urban Policy

Promote the economic health of cities and improve the quality of urban life.

Death Penalty

The LWVUS supports abolition of the death penalty.

Sentencing Policy

The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime. The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.

Human Trafficking

Oppose all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking.