

PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS

League of Women Voters of North Carolina

2008 edition

PREFACE

League action occurs at every level of government after members reach a position on an issue. A League "position" is defined as: (1) a set of guidelines by which proposed government action can be measured; or (2) an expression of League goals against which proposed government action can be evaluated. League boards, with this guidance from the membership, can then study proposed legislation or regulations, and have the flexibility to work with others to achieve our goals. The League board decides whether to support or oppose proposed measures on specific issues.

Public Policy Positions reviews state positions and the kinds of action that LWVNC has taken under both state and national positions. The state League has used national positions for action on state issues, on issues on which members have been kept continually informed, and on issues in the state program that delegates to state conventions have voted to continue. If any action has the potential to affect Leagues in other states, the state League consults with the national League and with the affected Leagues.

Local Leagues may also take action within their jurisdiction based on state and national posi-

tions just as the state League may take action under national positions. Some issues, such as specific instances of enforcement or siting of any facilities may be particularly controversial with broad impact and should, therefore, be included in local programs. If, however, such action would affect Leagues in other communities or have an impact beyond the borders of that particular League community, it is necessary to consult with the state or national League and with the other affected Leagues. Most importantly, members should support the action, be kept informed, and have opportunities for discussion and evaluation.

This edition was revised in 2008 on the basis of previously and recently adopted program and on the basis of legislative action in the years since the publication of the previous editions. This abbreviated edition eliminates the Legislative Background (History) of previous editions. That will be updated and included in the subsequent edition. More detailed positions and history are available in the *1997 Positions for Action* available online at www.lwvnc.org.

For a history of the early years of the League in North Carolina, refer to *In the Beginning: 1920 to 1950* by Annelle Houk for the Citizen Education Foundation and *A Voice for Change: The Years 1951 to 1995*, available from LWVNC.

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REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

Goals

- **Government should be open, accountable, ethical and responsive to citizens.**
- **Citizen participation on state boards should be encouraged.**
- **Measures to eliminate barriers to voting should be encouraged.**
- **Authority for administration and enforcement of election laws should be centralized in the State Board of Elections.**
- **Election procedures should be applied consistently across the state and from one county to another.**
- **A permanent, uniform voter registration should be maintained across the state.**
- **Training of election officials should be mandated and paid for by the state at both state and county levels.**

ELECTION LAWS

Promote measures that safeguard the rights of the voter and encourage clear and democratic election procedures. Promote and support election laws in North Carolina that emphasize full participation of all citizens in the democratic process.

Support changes in statutes to give counties the options in the elections of county commissioners similar to those given to municipalities in 1971 to elect the mayor and council (2005 concurrence).

ELECTION PROCESS. The decennial census requires nationwide and statewide reapportionment and redistricting, providing an opportunity to review mandates of the North Carolina Constitution as well as of the Voting Rights Act. The original LWV positions support centralization of authority for administration and enforcement of election laws and on the consistency of application of such laws across the state and from one county to another. Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) is supported (consensus 2007).

FAIR & EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION. Congressional districts, both houses of the

state legislature, county, as well as municipal government districts including boards of education, should be apportioned primarily according to population. Districts should be single-member, compact, convenient, contiguous, and should reflect a community of interest. Specific standards of fair representation as required by the National Voting Rights Acts should be assured.

The responsibility for redistricting and reapportioning should rest with an independent agency commissioned by the legislature once every ten years; the agency plan (for redistricting) should be submitted for legislative approval without amendment. The independent agency should not be a court. While the agency should reflect the geographic, racial, and gender make-up of the state population, no elected official should be a member. As a creature of the legislature, the agency should be subject to the Open Meetings Law. Definite provisions should be made for compensation and staff services of the independent agency.

A process should be provided to effect automatic, compulsory and periodic redistricting and reapportioning. Measures to enact this process should include: authority, enforcement powers, time schedule, and funding. The specific measure may take the form of a constitutional amendment or legislation.

Specific provisions should be made for court review of redistricting and reapportioning measures and for courts to require the independent agency to act on a specific schedule.

The state and its political subdivisions should be redistricted and reapportioned every ten years within a year of certification of the census.

Definite time limits should be set for an agency to act after the decennial census figures are available in order to comply with federal Voting Rights legislation. Time limits should be set for initiating court action for review of the constitutionality of measures.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE. Improve methods of financing political campaigns in order to ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and

promote citizen participation in the political process.

NON-PARTISAN SELECTION OF JUDGES.

The League supports:

- Non-partisan selection of judges
- The concept of a broadly-based judiciary nominating commission for the selection of well-qualified nominees and appointment, preferably from the nominees

CITIZEN RIGHTS

PUBLIC POLICY ON REPRODUCTIVE CHOICES. Protect the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

FISCAL POLICY

TAX POLICY. Support an equitable and efficient system of taxation in North Carolina that will adequately fund needed services at both the state and local level.

- The burden of taxes should be in proportion to the citizens' ability to pay.
- All citizens have the duty/right to contribute to the common good.
- For government to tax in excess of the requirements of the common good or to waste tax revenues is unjust since this unfairly deprives the citizen of his property and the product of his labor without a corresponding common benefit.
- The taxation and appropriation process should allow government the necessary flexibility for responsible fiscal management.
- The use of tax laws as incentives or disincentives to action should be viewed in the light of the common good.
- The granting of tax preferences (e.g., exemptions, deductions, etc.) should be genuinely premised on the promotion of the common interest and not upon special interest or favoritism.
- Taxes once established should be collected with even-handed enforcement.
- The norm for choosing a form of taxation should first be the equitable distribution of civic burden and not the ease of collection or lack of popular opposition. However, where there are equivalent, equitable options the simpler methods should be used.
- The tax system should be diversified to provide a broad revenue base and to minimize the effect of imperfections in any one tax. Each form of taxation should not be examined in isolation but evaluated as part of the total tax system. Further, the impact of tax laws should be consistent with other public

policies, e.g., the conservation of energy, the preservation of neighborhoods, etc.

CORPORATE INCOME TAXES. Support a corporate income tax schedule with graduated rates increasing as income rises. General business franchise rates, taxes and other franchise rates should be reviewed and adjusted. Exemptions for business should be reconsidered.

HIGHWAY FUND TAXES. If more revenue is needed for the highway fund, the highway use tax and overweight permits should be increased. Remove the \$300 ceiling on the motor vehicle tax.

INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX. The current state individual income tax system should be simplified and better reflect ability to pay. Methods of determining individual taxable income should be aligned more closely with the federal income tax system. The state can apply its own policies through adjustments to income and levels of deductions. Joint return filing should be permitted. The standard deduction should be increased, and provisions made for future adjustments through periodic review and revision. Tax progressivism should be established with a broader range of tax rates, and the threshold for paying any income tax needs to be raised. Any exemptions should be applied to all types of pensions.

PROPERTY TAXES. Low-income property owners should be protected by some form of "circuit breaker" when they cannot afford the property tax.

SALES TAX. Regressive taxes on essential products and services, such as food and utilities, should be removed. Current exemptions and preferential sales tax rates should be reviewed to determine if they are justified, consistent, and equitable. There should be an equitable extension of the sales tax to all services.

NEW REVENUE SOURCES. All local governments should be given the option to utilize new revenue sources such as impact fees, land transfer fees, and room occupancy fees. There should be a severance tax for the removal of natural products from the ground.

LWVNC and local Leagues may act upon any of the positions taken by LWVUS. A complete list of the LWVUS positions can be found at www.lwv.org.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Goals

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest by recognizing the interrelationships of air quality, energy, land use, waste management, and water resources.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government. Organize State Agencies for the Management and Regulation of Natural Resources.

OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS LEASING EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

Promote changes in the policies, procedures, and regulations governing the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) and Tidelands.

Provide strict regulation to protect the environment, require responsible government management of the public's natural resources. Decisions on such protection and management must be based on a process that provides time and opportunity for full citizen participation.

The orderly and prudent development of publicly owned petroleum resources – both national and state – must be guided by national and state energy policies that recognize these resources as finite and not expendable. We support a decreased reliance on fossil fuels and an increased emphasis on conservation and the use of renewable energy sources. Such a policy would dictate greatly reduced frequency and size in lease sales with improved environmental safeguards.

Policies, procedures, and regulations must comply with all federal and state laws.

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. Support high air quality

through control of pollutants including acid rains and toxins.

Support measures to reduce vehicular pollution, including inspection and maintenance of emission controls; changes in engine design and fuel types and development of more energy efficient transportation systems; regulations and reduction of pollution from stationary sources; regulation and reduction of ambient toxic-air pollutants; measures to reduce trans-boundary air pollutants, such as ozone and those that cause acid deposition.

ENERGY. Support energy goals and policies that acknowledge the United States as a responsible member of the world community; reduction of energy growth rates; use of a variety of energy sources, including alternative energy, conserving energy and using energy-efficient technologies; the environmentally sound use of energy resources, with consideration of the entire cycle of energy production; predominant reliance on renewable resources; policies that limit reliance on nuclear fission; action by appropriate levels of government to encourage the use of renewable resources, alternative energy and energy conservation through funding for research and development, financial incentives, rate-setting policies, and mandatory standards; mandatory energy conservation measures, including thermal standards for building efficiency, new appliance standards, and standards for new automobiles with no relaxation of auto-emission control requirements; policies to reduce energy demand and minimize the need for new generating capacity through techniques such as marginal cost or peak-load pricing or demand management programs; maintaining deregulation of oil and natural gas prices; assistance for low-income individuals when energy policies bear unduly on the poor.

LAND USE. Support land use policies of statewide and regional application that would effectively guide development to conserve resources and protect the natural environment. Support property tax policies which will promote wise use of land to meet present and future needs.

WATER RESOURCES. Promote high water quality standards through monitoring, water-

shed protection regulation, stormwater management, basin-wide water resource planning, coastal water resource protection, and equitable financing.

WASTE MANAGEMENT. Support a comprehensive waste management program that would encourage waste prevention, reduction, recovery and recycling and that would discourage the underground storage of hazardous materials. Hazardous waste that cannot be reduced, stabilized or destroyed should be stored in long-term retrievable storage until adequate technology is available.

Support: policies to reduce the generation and promote the reuse and recycling of solid and hazardous wastes; policies to ensure safe treatment, transportation, storage, and disposal of solid and wastes in order to protect public health and air, water, and land resources; planning and decision-making processes that recognize suitable solid and hazardous wastes as potential resources; policies for the management of civilian and military high- and low-level radioactive wastes to protect public health and air, water, and land resources; establishment of processes for effective involvement of state and local governments and citizens in siting proposals for treatment, storage, disposal and transportation of radioactive wastes; full environmental review of treatment, storage and disposal facilities for radioactive wastes; safe transport, storage, and disposal of radioactive wastes.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

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SOCIAL POLICY

Goals

Promote social and economic justice, secure equal rights for all, and combat discrimination and poverty.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

EQUAL RIGHTS. Promote economic, social, legal, and constitutional equality for women.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Promote fair and equal treatment of all citizens involved in the criminal justice system, including victims and witnesses.

Promote swift, sure, and fair disposition for every defendant and promote measures to assure the relief of overcrowding and inmate idleness; support improved services to juveniles through mandatory statewide guidelines, special training for personnel, and elimination of inter-agency fragmentation; support improvements in education and/or training for employment, and family visitation for incarcerated females; provide special assistance to handicapped inmates; and encourage increased use of alternatives to incarceration for non-violent crimes.

Support the establishment of a witness assistance program in every court district.

Support limited compensation for all victims of violent crimes, including services and financial support for all victims regardless of their income.

Establish community alternatives to incarceration in state training schools and local jails.

Encourage increased attention by policy makers to the needs of females in jails and prisons (family visitation, education, vocational training and work release opportunities).

CHILD CARE

Promote the availability of quality day care to all North Carolina families regardless of socioeconomic status, through adequate state and federal standards, financial assistance, and monitoring the enforcement of those standards.

Support a statewide public pre-school program with appropriately accredited teachers (consensus 1969).

The League supports:

- higher standards for licensing requirements, abolishing 20% tolerance above the number of children in the licensing specifications
- better staff training
- judging compliance at group level, equalization of licensing and certification standards
- strengthening existing monitoring programs and policies, greater emphasis on regulations and monitoring in the areas of health and safety, specific standards and required registration of family day care homes
- requiring an educational developmental program for all center-based day care
- a single state day care unit for licensing, certification, and monitoring
- a citizen majority on the Day Care Licensing Commission
- federal assistance to reimburse cost of care at a ceiling, to assist licensed centers meet certification standards, to help families needing day care but exceeding Title guidelines
- abolishing socioeconomic segregation within the day care system
- encouraging state to purchase care from private centers
- encouraging families to purchase care from certified centers
- diversity of child care options
- more services to families with special needs, including: transportation, after-school care, migrant workers, families with handicapped or emotionally disturbed parents/children
- industry supported day care through tax incentives to businesses, scholarships for purchasing care, on-site care.
- a program of community and parental awareness.

ELDER CARE

Support the state in taking an aggressive role in the provision of services to dependent older adults.

Create standards and enforcement mechanisms.

- Establish, monitor and enforce standards defining state and county responsibilities for institutions ranging from in-home residential care to nursing homes

- Expand and improve Ombudsman program services.
- Improve opportunities for citizen participation in establishing and monitoring county and state policies and programs

Ensure access to services.

- Establish, in each county, a single point of entry for information, referral, and intake for dependent older adults and families in need of assistance with their care
- Guarantee equitable access to all services
- Equalize formulas for county funding from the state based on age, race, poverty and other demographic status of the county
- Establish eligibility for public subsidies for services based on age, income, functional impairment, and type of residence and family support
- Expand and improve Medicaid eligibility

Require minimum services. Create, in every county, access to the following core services, not necessarily provided by the county, but accessible through county referral, for example: transportation, adult daycare, in-home aides, congregate meals, home-delivered meals, protective services, medical equipment, and therapies.

EDUCATION

Promote quality education for all students through the secondary level, with a continuing emphasis on the equalization of financing of public schools, and consolidation of school districts, when feasible, to provide for improved administration, better use of facilities, and broadened school instructional offerings.

Support continual monitoring of charter schools. Pay particular attention to funding, planning time, achievement of stated missions and goals, innovative teaching methods, and the impact on traditional public schools.

Support developmentally appropriate early childhood education.

Improve quality of teaching through such means as in-service training, more comprehensive teacher training programs, and higher salaries.

Support appointment of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Support increased citizen participation through formation of school site and district public school advisory committees.

Continue efforts to improve administrative efficiency and judicious use of funds. State funding should be sufficient to support state cur-

riculum requirements in all counties.

EARLY INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

Support policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well being and encourage the full development and ensure the safety of all children. These include: 1) child abuse/ neglect prevention; 2) teen pregnancy prevention; 3) quality healthcare, including nutrition and prenatal care; 4) early childhood education; 5) developmental services, emphasizing children ages 0-3; 6) family support services; and 7) violence prevention.

HOUSING

Promote equal access to housing for all citizens of North Carolina. Support the adoption of a statewide housing policy and a minimum statewide housing code. Support a state initiative to increase the supply of housing for low-income persons in the wake of decreased federal funding.

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