

## **LWVUS Program Planning Information - 2016**

**Discussion of these proposals will take place at the February Drinks & Dialogue  
Wednesday, February 17, from 5:30 - 7:00 pm, Doc Ryan's, Forest Park**

### **Looking Ahead to 2016 and Beyond**

#### **Overview of a Possible Program Focus: Making Democracy Work**

As Convention 2016 and Election 2016 and their outcomes draw near, it is abundantly clear that our work is far from finished in *making democracy work* for every voter and every voice in our communities. From our interactions with League leaders and members, from the results of a recent member survey, and based on the political outlook for the next two years, we believe that every League will likely continue to focus resources on the core democracy issues that are part of the 2014-2016 program. The LWVUS Board believes that our 2016-2018 program should recognize this reality and do the same. The opportunities that we see over the next biennium are as follows:

- ***Voting Rights and Voter Protection***

In Congress, we must continue to push for restoration of the Voting Rights Act by supporting the bipartisan Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA). We must continue to support positive reforms such as online voter registration for all, portable voter registration within each state, and reforms to provisional voting, areas for which there are already pending bills. We must continue pushing this administration and the next to comply with the National Voter Registration Act by allowing voters to register through the federally-facilitated health care exchanges.

- ***Money in Politics***

Congress can take action to reform money in politics. Including the Stop Super PAC-Candidate Coordination Act in the House, there is legislation on each of the three pillars of our work on campaign finance: disclosure, stopping Super PACs, and public financing of congressional and presidential elections. There is also an anti-bundling bill. In addition, Congress can and must ensure meaningful enforcement of existing and future laws. The Federal Election Commission can't fix itself, but Congress surely can. These reforms can be made despite recent decisions of the Supreme Court.

- ***Supporting Voting Rights and Voter Protection in the States***

In the states the fight continues in statehouses and courthouses to prevent legislation that suppresses the vote. Support also continues for reforms like on-line voter registration and expansion of early voting. These efforts are most successful when state Leagues can rely on LWVUS for resources in the form of shared expertise and coordination of strategies and messaging. State Leagues play a critical role, too, in developing partnerships and coalitions to protect the vote, not only in state legislatures but also in local communities. Collaborating with LWVUS, state Leagues take the leading role in advocacy for voter protection but also in coordinating statewide campaigns around voting issues.

- ***Supporting Voting Rights and Voter Protection in Local Communities***

In recent years local League voter service has joined the front lines of voter protection. The 2016 election will be the first presidential election in 50 years in which voters cannot rely on the protections of the Voting Rights Act to ensure free and fair access to the polls. Never has a local presence--real people in real communities--been a greater asset for the League. Registering voters in underserved communities, high schools, community colleges, and at naturalization ceremonies has become the primary focus of our voter service work. Long-standing relationships with elections officials have already produced good results in preventing careless or not so careless decisions regarding precinct locations and distribution of polling place resources in the wake of the Shelby decision. More is required. It is critical that, in this upcoming election, we promote and support a local presence in our most vulnerable communities by working together with community partners and using our 95 years of election experience to protect voters in the next election.

- ***Voting Rights and Voter Protection Following Election 2016***

The past five years have shown that elections have important consequences for both candidates and voters. Long lines at the polls in 2012 prompted the president to appoint the Presidential Commission on Election Administration to examine best election practices from the perspective of voter experience. The resulting recommendations provide an excellent road map for election reform at state and local levels. The League and our partners will be on the ground next November, but our election observations are meaningless unless we take them back to the appropriate decision makers.

Election 2016 will be the most expensive in our history. The issue of money in politics does not end the day after an election, nor is it confined to federal elections or the federal government. Leagues are working hard to update our campaign finance reform position, and it is incumbent on all of us to work at every level of government to ensure that power is in the hands of the many and not the few.

Redistricting reform continues to be a goal for the League. Armed with a position every state League can use, we look forward to more robust efforts to accomplish this goal. LWVUS will provide both venues for coordination and expert assistance. Progress has been made already, but League-wide support can strengthen the effort.

In addition, given the current political climate, there will likely be continued calls to amend the U.S. Constitution through a convention. The lessons learned through our study of the amendment process will inform LWV's education and advocacy in this area.

### **Impact on League Resources**

League program—local, state and national--derives from our overall mission and reflects League leaders' and members' best assessment of how to allocate resources to advance the mission in a particular period of time. Volunteer time as well as staff and financial resources are limited. Using those resources to have the greatest impact is a key decision at every League annual meeting and convention. National League bylaws define program as "Action to implement the Principles and those governmental issues

chosen by the convention for concerted study or concurrence and action..." The League Principles are concepts of government supported by the League and "are the authorization for adoption of national, state and local program." Action to implement those principles guides every League activity. All our work is program and, in planning for the next year or two, all our work is relevant to the decisions that delegates to a convention must make.

### **Proposing LWVUS Program for 2016-2018**

Input from grassroots leaders is key to developing LWVUS program in every biennium. Given the challenges facing our democracy at every level of government and in every corner of the country, the LWVUS Board believes that, in order for our leaders in local and state Leagues and ILO's to give thoughtful input, it is important to provide our recommendations and the data on which those recommendations are based at the outset of the program planning process. In doing so, the LWVUS Board is in no way suggesting that these recommendations are set in stone or that input from Leagues will not be a key component in shaping the final recommendations. We are also keenly aware of the many other important issues facing state and local Leagues and that Leagues are actively engaged in *making democracy work* at every level of government. It is vital that we focus our national programmatic work such that it complements and does not compete with work at other levels.

Support for a League-wide focus comes from a recent member survey. In November 2015 the LWVUS conducted an online survey of individual League members in order to understand how members are involved in the organization and their interest in specific public policy issues. Responses came from individuals representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands and Hong Kong. The survey findings told us members engage with the League primarily at the local level. Respondents identified money in politics, voting rights, redistricting and climate change as the main areas for League focus. These are the issues where Leagues at every level are knowledgeable and play a leadership role in their communities.

A program recommendation to Convention 2016 is not to be confused with the legislative priorities adopted by the LWVUS Board every year. While the board is asking League leaders to support a program recommendation that focuses on core democracy action and education, LWVUS legislative priorities will continue to cover a range of important issues beyond just those in the program focus. Legislative priorities for the past several years have included, in addition to election protection, climate change and health care.

### **GUIDE TO LWVUS PROGRAM PLANNING 2016-18**

#### **Timeline for 2016-2018 LWVUS Program Planning**

- **December 2015** – Program Planning materials will be available online.
- **January 2016** – Program planning webinar
- **March 1, 2016** – Deadline for submission of online response forms.
- **April 2016** – LWVUS Board will develop a Proposed Program for 2016-2018 that reflects input from Leagues.

- **June 2016** – Convention delegates will adopt 2016-2018 LWVUS program after debate and discussion, including any not-recommended items granted consideration by convention and adopted by a majority vote of the delegates.

### **What Do We Mean by League Program?**

League program means the strategies we adopt to achieve desired outcomes that are contained in League Principles (<http://lww.org/content/principles>) and positions on public policy issues (<http://lww.org/content/impact-issues>).

**Art. XII, Sec. 1 and 2** of the **LWVUS Bylaws** defines program as follows:

**Sec 1. Principles:** The Principles are concepts of government supported by the League and are the authorization for adoption of national, state and local program....

**Sec. 2 Program.** The program shall consist of action to implement the Principles and those governmental issues chosen by the convention for concerted study or concurrence and action...

The positions that, along with the Principles, form the basis of all League action derive from member study and agreement. Through study members have the opportunity to become informed before making decisions about the governmental issue under consideration. Agreement can be reached either by consensus, that is by determining the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas or by concurrence, a vote on a position statement. Concurrence can be used at convention. For instance, at the 2014 LWVUS Convention, delegates concurred with a position of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey on human trafficking.

### **How to Participate in LWVUS Program Planning for 2016-2018**

With this Program Planning Guide, the LWVUS Board is asking local, state, and ILO Boards to submit their input for our national program of League education and advocacy for the 2016-2018 biennium.

Over the past decade or so, despite efforts to increase engagement in LWVUS program planning, participation has held steady at approximately 250 Leagues (out of a total 750-plus local and state Leagues); of these 250 Leagues, most participate regularly. We understand the reasons why Leagues may opt out of program planning. Besides limits on time and other resources faced by Leagues, a new wave of leaders is filling our ranks, some of whom lack experience with League basics, such as program and its power to increase League impact, advance our mission, and make positive community, state, and national change. In addition, Leagues today are working in new communication and engagement environments in which some members prefer to engage online. State and local Leagues face similar challenges in engaging members in planning their programs.

There is no restriction in the methods used by the LWVUS Board to elicit program recommendations from state and local Leagues and ILOs. In the past, many Leagues have engaged their members in face-to-face program planning meetings. **While it is fine to continue that practice, program planning meetings are optional.** Leagues



may also choose to incorporate program planning in a regularly scheduled board meeting, with board members providing input.

In providing input, we ask that your central focus be on where the League should put its energies and resources in the coming biennium. Consider

- In what way can the League best empower citizens to shape a better nation and communities during the next two years?
- What do our communities and nation need from the League right now?
- Where can the League's strengths have the greatest impact?
- What program work would best help enhance the League's influence, credibility, visibility, and membership?
- Should the focus be that proposed by LWVUS: a nationwide League campaign: *Making Democracy Work*, taking the power from the few and returning it to the many, as the single focus for LWVUS education and advocacy work in the 2016-2018 biennium? If the answer is "yes," what specific activities should be included in the campaign? What kinds of training and assistance would enhance your League's participation in the campaign?
- If your League would rather recommend another issue for education or advocacy as an alternative to the proposed focus, provide the details of your proposal, including a statement of the problem that needs to be addressed, an analysis of the unique role the LWV can play in helping resolve the issue, and a description of some of the specific activities the League could undertake on the issue.

### **Resource Considerations**

In recommending a program item for 2016-2018, please be mindful of the resource commitments required for your own League, as well as for LWVUS. A recommendation is a request to make that item a high priority for the biennium at all the levels of League. If a recommendation is adopted, Leagues with limited resources—financial and volunteer—may find it necessary to drop other activities in order to participate.

### **Suggested Sources of Help**

- Current LWVUS positions in *Impact on Issues, 2014-2016* available for free viewing and download at and the *Clearinghouse* that lists many state and local League studies and positions:
- Webinar on LWVUS Program Planning, 7 pm EST, January 7, 2016. Register at [https://events-na4.adobeconnect.com/content/connect/c1/831402129/en/events/event/shared/default\\_template\\_simple/event\\_landing.html?sco-id=1278215367](https://events-na4.adobeconnect.com/content/connect/c1/831402129/en/events/event/shared/default_template_simple/event_landing.html?sco-id=1278215367)
- If your League wants to promote a proposal to other Leagues for their consideration, you can obtain email addresses for state and local Leagues by contacting [database@lww.org](mailto:database@lww.org). Your League's request will be fulfilled within five (5) days of the request. This contact information may be used to communicate by email on program planning as well as on other convention related matters. Every League is entitled to receive one free copy in each biennium.
- If you have questions about the response form or program planning process, please email [progplan@lww.org](mailto:progplan@lww.org).

