

# GOVERNMENT

## Summary of League of Women Voters of the United States Positions and Major Action by the Illinois League Under the LWVUS Positions

**Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive; that has a fair and adequate fiscal basis; that protects individual liberties established by the Constitution; that assures opportunities for citizen participation in government decision making; that provides sound agriculture policies; and that preserves public health and safety through gun control measures.**

**REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT:** Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive.

***LWVIL action*** The League of Women Voters of Illinois approved a recommendation from the Issues and Action Committee in late 2003 to assess how well Illinois citizens are represented by the elected officials they send to Springfield. Fitting in with the core mission of *Making Democracy Work*, the **Democracy Project** is designed to strengthen citizen participation and restore public confidence in our state government.

The need for the project became evident in the spring of 2003 when over 250 shell bills were advanced to third reading in the House with little description of substance. On the last two days of session, 26 of those shell bills were used as vehicles for substantial legislation including budget legislation leaving citizens and many legislators without time to have input. In 2004, League members monitored bills, including shell bills, in the General Assembly. Local Leagues conducted legislative interviews in district with their elected officials soliciting a broad range of feedback on shell bills. During the interviews, ways to empower rank and file members throughout the legislative process began to emerge.

The second phase of the project included research done by LWVIL staff. Political science and policy experts in Illinois were interviewed and asked how they viewed the process and if they felt it involved meaningful public input. This input from experts helped the League formulate our survey on legislative process for 2005 legislative interviews. Legislative leaders were interviewed by the Democracy Project Committee. In both sets of interviews some expressed opinions that the current system is running well and others that the system needs improvements.

In the spring of 2005, local League members conducted the annual legislative interviews with their local legislators using the legislative process questionnaire. Additionally, in April, LWVIL held Lobby Day in Springfield where League members acted as an "Observer Corps". These members met with available local legislators and observed the legislative process. Responses from legislative interviews and Lobby Day were collected and summarized.

## **CITIZEN RIGHTS**

**Citizen's Right to Know/Citizen Participation** (1984): Protect the citizen's right to know and facilitate citizen participation in government decision making.

**LWVIL action** Since the adoption of Illinois' Open Meetings Act in 1957 and revisions/ amendments to the act in 1995, LWVIL has supported legislation to strengthen the act and opposed proposals that would weaken it. A LWVIL memo describing changes in the law and copies of a new Guide to the Illinois Open Meetings Act prepared by the Illinois Attorney General were distributed to local Leagues in 1995. Local Leagues have used the act frequently while monitoring their local governments. In 1983, LWVIL supported the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Records Act, which allow citizens, members of civic organizations and the media to have access to documents, records and reports that state and local governments keep on file. In 2004, LWVIL opposed legislation which would have limited the time to sue after receiving notice of denial of appeal of a request for disclosure of documents. The League continues to monitor the implementation of these acts.

**Individual Liberties** (1982): Oppose major threats to basic constitutional rights.

**LWVIL action** In 2000, LWVIL supported a series of legislative initiatives designed to codify in Illinois the Federal Violence Against Women Act. If passed, these initiatives would have provided civil remedies for gender based violence. Additionally, LWVIL supported legislation requiring the Secretary of State to determine the extent of racial profiling in traffic stops. In 2003, LWVIL Convention delegates approved a Will of the Convention calling for LWVUS to work for abolition of the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism). Many local Leagues held forums to educate members and the public on provisions of the Act. In 2004, League members were asked to support the Security and Freedom Ensure (SAFE) Act that addresses some of the most problematic provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act.

**Public Policy on Reproductive Choices** (1983): Protect the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

**LWVIL action** LWVIL supports measures that protect a woman's access to reproductive health care, including the Freedom of Choice Act, and bills to assure safe entrance to health care facilities. It opposes efforts to require parental consent and notification. In 1999, League opposed legislative efforts to prohibit so-called "partial-birth" abortions and efforts to restrict the use of Medicaid monies to fund abortions. League was successful in persuading the Governor to veto a bill which would have banned payment for medically necessary abortions for women receiving Medicaid health benefits.

## **CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENCY**

**Congress** (1972, revised 1982): Support responsive legislative processes characterized by accountability, representativeness, decision-making capability and effective performance.

**LWVIL action** No recent action.

2009-2011 Where We Stand

**The Presidency** (1976, revised 1982): Promote a dynamic balance of power between the executive and legislative branches within the framework set by the Constitution.

**LWVIL action** No recent action.

## **ELECTION PROCESS**

**Apportionment** (1966, revised 1982): Support apportionment of congressional districts and elected legislative bodies at all levels of government based substantially on population.

**LWVIL action** The League has supported apportionment based on population and a state apportionment process open to the public (see LWVIL State Redistricting position, pg. 46).

**Campaign Finance** (1974, revised 1982): 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.

**LWVIL action** The League has supported public financing of campaigns for all state offices, and campaign finance and government ethics reforms in Illinois. In 1995, the League joined the Task Force on Campaign Finance Reform in Illinois, a project of Illinois Issues and the Institute for Public Affairs, to research and promote public discussion of the role of money in politics. The final report of the project, Tainted Democracy: How Money Distorts the Election Process In Illinois and What Must Be Done to Reform the Campaign Finance System, was published in January of 1997. Subsequently the LWVIL Education Fund received a grant from the Joyce Foundation to study the feasibility of building a statewide coalition to conduct educational outreach on the issue. The study resulted in a two-year grant to the Education Fund from the Joyce Foundation beginning in September 1997, to build a statewide organization, the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform (ICPR), to promote public understanding, support, and advocacy for reform of the campaign finance system in Illinois. This grant was renewed in the fall of 1999 for two years. In the spring of 2001, ICPR began the process of spinning off as a separate not-for-profit entity.

In April of 1998, the LWVIL Education Fund received a \$19,285 one-year grant from the LWVUS to create a statewide public dialogue about campaign finance reform.

In the 1998 spring legislative session, the General Assembly passed ethics and campaign finance reform legislation know as the Gift Ban Act (P.A. 90-0737). The League was generally supportive of the measure as a first step in reforming campaign finance in Illinois. A bill was introduced late in the November 1999 veto session to overturn the mandatory electronic filing component of the 1998 Act. Pressure was exerted through press contacts and advocacy on the part of local League members and the bill was shelved. In August of 2000, a lower state court judge ruled the State Gift Ban unconstitutional because it prohibited gifts above a "nominal" value. The Illinois Supreme Court upheld the Act in May 2002.

In the spring of 1999, the statewide LWVIL Campaign Finance Reform Committee initiated a contributions limits bill. The bill passed the Illinois House Election and Campaign Reform Committee with a bipartisan vote, but died in the House Rules Committee. During the 2000 session the LWVIL Committee worked to forward legislation focused on public funding, a statewide voter guide and the elimination of direct corporate and union contributions.

In 2001, local Leagues circulated petitions calling for ethics reform legislation. The LWVIL participated on the Illinois Voters Guide task force that presented its final report in 2001. The League also initiated a second contribution limits bill. Working with the Campaign Finance Reform Coalition (CFRC), League supported legislation to ban gambling contributions to campaigns, reinstate ethics legislation and promote a statewide voters guide for constitutional officers.

In 2002, the League and the CFRC distributed petitions supporting ethics and asked candidates for state constitutional office and the state legislature to sign an ethics pledge. In addition, the League and CFRC worked for approval of legislation (P.A. 92-0853) which barred government officials from soliciting campaign contributions from people or businesses they regulate, license, or inspect, and set a \$100 a year limit on gifts from lobbyists to elected officials.

In 2003, LWVIL and CFRC supported legislation to prohibit political activity by state employees on state time, create ethics commissions with enforcement powers for both the legislative and executive branches, and increase disclosure requirements for special interest groups that buy broadcast time, among other reforms. In the fall 2003 veto session, a comprehensive ethics package passed (P.A. 93-065). Local League members lobbied their legislators and LWVIL participated in a Springfield press conference along with other Campaign Finance Reform Coalition members.

After reviewing the League position on the merit selection of judges (see Constitution Implementation and Amendments, pg. 11), the delegates to the 2003 LWVIL Convention adopted a position allowing the League to advocate for the public financing of judicial elections which constitutes an opportunity to limit the size and type of campaign contributions as a means of combating undue influence in the election process.

In 2007, LWVIL supported Pay to Play legislation which finally became law in late 2008 after the General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto. The law (P.A. 95-0971) prohibits contributions from business owners to the elected official who awards state contracts of more than \$50,000 to the contractor. LWVIL wrote letters and sent TFAs encouraging members to contact their legislators in support of this bill. The LWVIL also supported bills to strengthen state laws regulating lobbying of state government, and provide for voluntary public funding of Appellate and Supreme Court election campaigns. Written testimony was submitted at the Committee on Elections and Campaign Finance Reform on behalf of a campaign contribution limits bill. In February 2007 LWVIL submitted a statement in support of a Transparency in Government Bill that would require the Illinois Treasurer's Office to list publicly where the state's money is invested.

In response to the latest corruption charges against and subsequent impeachment of the sitting governor in early 2009 the IL Lt. Governor created the Illinois Reform Commission, the IL General Assembly convened the Joint Committee on Government 2009-2011 Where We Stand

Reform and CHANGE Illinois a new coalition of civic, business, labor, professional, non-profit and philanthropic organizations was formed. LWVIL along with the CHANGE Illinois called for an end to Illinois' unregulated campaign finance system and for creation of a system of campaign contribution limits, like those in use at the federal level. In March 2009 LWVIL presented Testimony to the Joint Committee on Government Reform and sent TFAs to members asking them to contact their legislators. The General Assembly passed HB7 which fell short of real reform. Under pressure from League members, the press and the public in August 2009 the Governor vetoed HB7.

CHANGE Illinois and the League have urged the governor and legislative leaders to work together to craft a stronger piece of reform legislation to be passed during the October veto session. An efficient and effective law to control contributions needs the following: Reasonable limits applied to all individual and PAC contributions to candidates and parties; Limits on fund transfers among political committees, as well as coordinated expenditures on behalf of a candidate; Limits on contributions to candidates applied by each election cycle, not each calendar year; More complete and frequent disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures; and A strengthened oversight agency with sufficient authority and resources to enforce the law, conduct random audits, and investigate and impose penalties for violations.

**Selection of the President** (1970, revised 1982, updated 2004): Promote the election of the President and the Vice President by direct popular vote and work to abolish the Electoral College; support uniform national voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections. Support efforts to provide voters with sufficient information about candidates.

**LWVIL action** The LWVUS 2002 Convention adopted a review of this position and Illinois League members participated in the process (see LWVUS Voting Rights, this section, and LWVIL State Election Laws position, pg. 35).

**VOTING RIGHTS** (1976, revised 1982): Protect the right of every citizen to vote; encourage all citizens to vote.

**LWVIL action** Illinois Leagues have worked to increase the accessibility of polling places for the disabled, to expand voter registration opportunities in the state, and to pass the National Voter Registration Act (Motor Voter) that was signed into law in 1993. During the summer of 2001, Illinois local Leagues participated in the LWVUS survey of election officials. The survey's findings were published in November 2001. At the same time, LWVIL conducted its own survey of Illinois election authorities. (See LWVIL State Election Laws on page 35 for results of this survey.) Illinois Leagues also acted in support of the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) that Congress passed in 2002. This major piece of legislation calls for numerous election reforms that affect many parts of the electoral process. Among HAVA's requirements is one that each state form a planning committee to help guide its implementation within the state. The LWVIL president served on Illinois' planning committee for voter education and outreach.

**DC Self-Government and Full Voting Representation** (revised 1982 and 2000): Secure for the citizens of the District of Columbia the rights of self-government and full voting representation in both houses of Congress. Support restoration of an annual, predictable federal payment to the District to compensate for revenues denied and expenses incurred because of the federal presence.

***LWVIL action*** The LWVIL supported the agenda of the national League at the LWVUS 2000 Convention, which continues to advocate for DC voting rights, the right of self-government and an annual federal payment to compensate the District for revenues denied and expenses incurred due to the presence of the federal government. LWVUS continues to designate DC Rights as a 2007 legislative priority. In 2007, LWVUS supported a measure to add two voting representatives in the House; one for Washington DC and one for Utah. Local Leagues support this effort by responding to LWVUS action alerts.