

Constitutional Convention

2009 Issues Briefing

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At the 2007 LWVIL Convention, the League membership authorized a study of the need for a State Constitutional Constitution. The question of whether a convention should be held was scheduled to be on the November 2008 ballot.

A workshop on the Constitutional Convention (“Con-Con”) was held at the 2006 Issues Briefing. The speakers, Ann M. Lousin and Charles N. Wheeler III, talked about the 1969 Con-Con and gave their opinions about the need for another convention. Both opposed the call for a convention.

The morning program at the 2007 Issues Briefing was a panel discussion on Con-Con. Nancy L. Kaszak spoke against the call to a convention. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn was supposed to speak in favor of holding a convention, but was unable to attend due to a death in his family. The moderator, Paul Green, was not in favor of holding a convention. The result was a discussion that was informative, but one-sided.

LWVIL formed a Study Committee to study the issue and prepare materials that the local Leagues could use to hold consensus meetings. The Study Committee met frequently from October to December 2007 in person and by e-mail. The committee prepared a Study Guide, which was approved by the LWVIL Board in January 2008. The Study Committee members were: Co-chairs Sharon Alter (LWV Chicago) and Kathryn Nesburg (LWV Oak Park-River Forest), Mary Ellen Barry (LWV Naperville), Helene Gabelnick, (LWV Chicago) Margaret Goldstein (LWV Chicago), Esta Kallen (LWV Chicago), Annie Logue (LWV Chicago), Mary Lubertozzi (Park Forest Area LWV), Lorna Neuneker (LaGrange Area LWV), Virginia Rosenberg (LWV Evanston), Carol Spielman, (LWV Highland Park), and Sylvia Tillman (LWVIL Board).

Local Leagues held consensus meetings using the Study Guide. Thirty-one local Leagues studied and reached consensus. Twenty seven local Leagues opposed the call to convention and four were unable to reach consensus

LWVIL Board voted to adopt a position opposing the call to convention on May 17, 2008.

The Study Committee prepared a Tool kit for Leagues to use to promote our position. It was available on the LWVIL web site and was sent to all local Leagues.

LWVIL joined a coalition called the Alliance to Protect the Illinois Constitution. As a member of the coalition, the League participated in a press conference, meetings with the editorial boards of the Chicago Tribune, Pioneer Press, and the Daily Herald and strategy meetings. LWVIL President Paula Lawson appeared on television on ABC 7 News Views and WTTW’s Chicago Tonight. League members representing the League position participated in radio interviews in Rockford, Peoria, and McDonough County

and as participants in panel discussions at public meetings around the state. Editorial pieces written by local Leagues appeared in local newspapers and the Chicago Tribune.

There was organized opposition in favor of holding a convention. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn and State Representative John A. Fritchey appeared at forums in favor of holding a convention. Others held meetings in favor of a convention.

On November 4, 2008, the call to convention was defeated. The final vote totals were:

- YES 1,493,203 (32.8% of those voting on Con-Con.)
- NO 3,062,724 (67.2% of those voting on Con-Con.)

On September 24, 2008 the Chicago Bar Association filed a lawsuit in the Circuit Court of Cook County against the Illinois Secretary of State and the Illinois State Board of Elections. The lawsuit charged that the Con-Con ballot violated applicable constitutional and statutory provisions because it provided an “explanation” that went beyond merely explaining the referendum and was biased. The lawsuit also charged that the explanation incorrectly informed voters that a failure to vote counted as a “no” vote. The judge ruled that each voter must be given a handout containing directions to voters to disregard the incorrect language when they voted. Some election judges failed to provide the handout to voters, so the lawsuit continues. A possible remedy would be a court order to hold another election.