

The League of Women Voters Decade of the 80's

The League of Women Voters of the 1980's was characterized by "vigilance and persistence." The League fought to maintain the gains of the 1960's and 1970's. They fought to stop threats to the environment, civil rights, and women's equality, while reaffirming their commitment to end poverty and to reform the welfare system. Additionally, they endorsed programs for arms control and to limit military spending.

The League was at the forefront of the passage of the Voting Rights Act Amendment of 1982 (VRA), which extended the VRA for another 25 years. This also made permanent the VRA's Section 2, prohibiting voting rights violations by any practices that discriminated based on race, regardless of whether or not the practices had been adopted with the intent to discriminate.

In 1983, the League supported the right of privacy in reproductive choices.

The League contributed significantly to help pass the 1986 Tax Reform Act. The Act included three major reforms: eliminate or reduce the value of many tax reductions, remove millions from tax rolls, and reduce the number of tax brackets.

Beginning in 1984, the League worked tirelessly towards the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988. This legislative act specified that recipients of federal funds must comply with all civil rights laws, not just those related to the particular program or activity that received the federal funding.

The League sponsored the Presidential Debates in 1980 and 1984. In 1987, the Democratic and Republican national committees created a Commission on Presidential Debates, which would lead to political party sponsorship. In response, the League argued that "voters deserve to see the candidates side by side in nonpartisan debates not controlled by the campaigns." The Commission presented the League with "take it or leave it" rules designed to protect the candidates and mislead the voters. The National League President, Nancy Neuman, explained that the League of Women Voters "has no intention of becoming an accessory to the hoodwinking of the American public." The League withdrew sponsorship of the 1988 debates.

In 1988, the League helped to pressure Congress towards the passage of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the United States and the Soviet

Union (INF-1988). The two nations agreed to reduce their nuclear arsenal and to employ on-site inspections for verification of compliance.

In 1984, 1986, and 1988, the League underwrote 150 debates among congressional candidates that focused on national security issues.

Clearly, members of the League of Women Voters had a significant impact on governmental legislation on a local, state, national, and international level, throughout the decade of the 1980's.

By Marge Massarello, League of Women Voters Oak Park and River Forest

Thank you to...

Nancy M. Neuman, *The League of Women Voters In Perspective 1920-1995*

Kay J. Maxwell, League of Women Voters U.S., *The League of Women Voters Through the Decades*

Barbara Stuhler, *For the Public Record, A Documentary History of the League of Women Voters*

Avoice, African American Voices in Congress

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