



2023 Issue Paper: Elections

Position Statements

In the current *Impact on Issues*, League of Women Voters of the United States states:

Founded by the activists who secured voting rights for women, the League has always worked to promote the values and processes of representative governments. Protecting and enhancing voting rights for all Americans; assuring opportunities for citizen participation and working for open, accountable, representative, and responsive government at every level—all reflect the deeply held convictions of the League of Women Voters.

The LWV of Washington, as stated in its *Program in Action 2021-2023*:

Election Methods

- Supports state election laws allowing for options for alternative election systems in governmental jurisdictions at both the state and local levels. (EM-1)
- Believes that consideration should be given, when evaluating elections systems, to how well they promote “representative-ness”, citizen participation and accountability, as well as keeping cost of elections within range by holding them in regularly scheduled General or Special Elections (EM-2)
- In the event that the primary continues as a part of Washington’s election system, (LWVWA) supports a primary that has the following elements:
 - is an “open” system not requiring advance party registration,
 - keeps voters’ party preferences from becoming a matter of public record
 - encourages minor party participation (EM-3)
- Supports a presidential primary only if the results play a decisive part in selecting party nominees. (EM-4)
- Supports adoption of election methods that produce proportional representation when electing representative government bodies such as councils, legislatures, and Congress. (EM-5)
- Supports the concept of a majority vote requirement for winners of single offices such as mayor or governor, as long as it is achieved using a voting method such as the Instant Runoff Vote, rather than a second, separate runoff election. (EM-6)

Election Laws and Procedures

- The Voters Pamphlet performs a valuable service in promoting an informed electorate and should be continued at state expense. The intent and effect of each ballot issue should be clearly set forth in language readily understandable by the voter. (EL-1)
- Voting procedures should serve the voter with a maximum of convenience, simplicity and efficiency while ensuring that the requirements of secrecy, accuracy and impartiality are maintained. (EL-2)
- Permanent, personal registration should be continued. Lists of voters should be accurate and current. Registration should be simple and convenient for voters while ensuring accuracy. The Voter Registration State Database (VRSD) should not be used to deny people the right to vote. (EL-3)

Summary of Issues for the 2023 Legislative Session

Local Options (Ranked Choice Voting) Bill

The Local Options Bill does not mandate changes to current election methods, rather, it gives options to allow local jurisdictions, up to the County Election level, the option to use RCV if they choose. If passed, the WA SoS is directed to adopt rules and guidance for county auditors to be sure implementation is uniform across the state, and sufficient support is available to implement the process. It would allow primary and general elections to be combined to cost taxpayers less. It would increase “representative-ness” and can lead to proportional representation.

Ranked Choice Voting for Presidential Primaries

The WA State presidential primary in 2020 was significant, because it was the first time that both major parties allocated delegates to their national convention based on the results of a primary.

However, the primary resulted in more than 25% of ballots (nearly 400,000) cast for the Democrat candidates being “wasted” because they were cast for candidates no longer in the race, or who had suspended their campaigns after ballots were mailed, but before ballots were tallied. Candidates who met the threshold for receiving state delegates were then able to redirect their delegates to another candidate - maybe one the original voter would not have chosen. RCV lets voters decide where their vote should be directed if first choice candidate is eliminated. It ensures that the winning candidate has a 50% majority among voters.

If Washington chooses a RCV method for presidential primary elections, it would join Alaska, Kansas, Wyoming, Hawaii and Nevada, who already use RCV for primaries, and New York City, which used RCV for its recent 2021 Mayoral election.

Eliminating Advisory Votes

The League supports legislation that would replace Advisory Votes with language in the voters’ pamphlet showing information about fiscal decisions using easy to understand pie charts.

Initiative 960, which voters passed in 2009, required that when the Legislature raised taxes, the next general election ballot would include a question, called an advisory vote, for voters to express their opinion whether to repeal or maintain the tax increase. There is no indication on the ballot that the outcome of this vote is in no way binding on the legislature. Advisory votes have no impact, and do not change legislation already passed.

Inclusion of advisory votes adds significant cost to elections, and in some cases, is more costly than the amount of the tax increase itself. Additionally, there are printing, postage and tallying costs which all have a major impact on the cost of the statewide voters’ pamphlet. Even in odd numbered years, when there may be no state races or ballot questions, the advisory vote pamphlet must still be sent to every household in the state. Because the law requires that advisory votes polls be at the top of the ballot, voters may be confused, discouraged, and overwhelmed, resulting in ballots only partially voted.

The law does require that for each tax increase, the voters’ pamphlet includes a short description of the tax increase, a 10-year cost projection, and a record of the legislators votes on the tax increase bill. There is no reference to the reason for the increase, nor information about how the money is being used included in the voters’ pamphlet.

Enhanced WA Voting Rights Act

This legislation would expand and clarify several provisions in the original Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA), making it easier for residents of Washington to have equitable representation. It would bar

methods of electing officeholders that create vote dilution and polarized voting. It seeks to protect members of classes who do not have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. It also allows organizations to bring actions under the VRA.

Backend Voter Registration

Currently, during Automatic Voter Registration agency transactions, people are asked if they would like to register to vote. This “front end” conversation takes extra transaction time and requires the employee to be well versed in the registration process. Applicants may opt out just due to time constraints.

“Back End” voter registration, using identifying documents as a prompt, automatically registers a person to vote without additional transaction time. Transactional time is shorter, less costly, and registers more voters.

Confirmation of the registration is mailed to the voter by the appropriate election agency, and the recipient then has the option to decline the registration. Back End Registration is used successfully in Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Delaware, and Massachusetts, and is deemed safe, secure, efficient from beginning to end.

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