

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE LEAGUE'S ADVOCACY PROCESS

### LEAGUE POSITIONS – THE BASIS FOR ACTION

“The League is unique among organization in that it arrives at its grassroots positions after study and consensus among members.

...

League action can occur only in support of one or more League positions. If there is not a position to support the proposed action, the League cannot act. Whether or not there is a position to support a proposed action can result in considerable debate, with some League members acting as strict constructionists of our positions and others taking a more organic approach. If you are unsure of whether a proposed action has a basis in a League position, call a meeting of the State Issues Committee.”

### PARTICIPANTS IN THE LEAGUE ADVOCACY PROCEDURE

*The issues and advocacy function is overseen by the League board with recommendations from the State Issues Committee.*

(Extrapolated from the League of Women Voters State Board Kit)

## BACKGROUND OF DECISION OF BOARD TO SUPPORT THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

### a. The Position:

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION Statement of Position As announced by the State Board, February 1993, added to, June 1993, revised June 2015

*The League of Women Voters of New York State does not support or oppose the holding of a constitutional convention. Added, June 1993.* The League of Women Voters of New York State recognizes that a constitutional convention is an acceptable (legal) method of amending the New York State Constitution and that the provision requiring periodic mandatory submission of the question of calling a convention is a proper procedure.

The impetus for a convention between the mandated twenty-year referenda should come from the public. However we feel that certain principles are essential throughout the process:

- Education and involvement of the public must be an integral part of each phase of the process.
- Planning should be given adequate time and sufficient funding.
- Nonpartisanship is essential.

The League believes that specific conditions should be incorporated in the policies and procedures established for constitutional conventions:

- **Pre-Convention Commission:** A preparatory commission should be appointed with adequate time to study the issues, establish the agenda and procedures and prepare position papers for the convention. Such a commission should provide ongoing information to the public and solicit its participation.
- **Convention delegates:** The League supports the following reforms as positive factors in deciding on support for a constitutional convention. Delegates should be elected by a fair nonpartisan process that complies with federal voting rights provisions and eases ballot access to encourage participation by racial and other minorities. Public financing should be provided for candidates and their positions on issues and convention goals should be widely publicized to enable voters to cast informed votes at their election. Statewide office holders, state or federal legislators, and state judges should not serve as delegates. Revised June 2015.
- **Convention process:** Procedures must be put in place to reduce partisanship, by assuring that committees and committee chairmanship are beyond party control. Reasonable time limits must be placed on the length of the convention and its costs.

The issues to be considered must be determined in advance by the pre-convention commission and researched by position papers, which are complete and available at the time of the convention. Meetings of the delegates should be open, held at acceptable convenient hours, with full media coverage.

- **Ballot Issues:** Widespread public hearings and adequate voter education are necessary prior to the placement of referenda on the ballot.

#### b. Application of Position

Before this year, this position was only applied once, in connection with the 1997 ballot question. The process of application of the position included the following:

- November 1996-Issues Committee issues report to the state board on the 1997 ballot question stating:
  - this is the appropriate time for the board to decide whether to support the ballot issue, oppose it, or remain neutral.
  - Clarifying that the italicized sentence added to the position in June 1993 was understood to refer to "the holding of a convention" as opposed to support of a ballot issue. The report explained that "[A]lthough we neither support nor oppose the holding of a convention, the board could never-the-less support the ballot issue."
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    - The State Board voted to oppose the ballot issue.
- The next action taken with regard to this position was a review and update in 2015. The members were informed that the purpose of the update was

- To make it more flexible and adaptable for the future (bringing it more in line with most League positions), and
- To clarify how the board should consider any reforms or lack thereof to the delegate selection process as part of the decision on whether or not to support the proposal for a constitutional convention when it comes up again for a vote in 2017.
- The members were also informed
  - That the update was “not intended to consider whether or not the League will support or oppose the proposal. The state board will decide that question in light of current policy concerns and the entire League position.”

The update was almost unanimously approved by local leagues (one exception) and adopted in June 2015.

#### c. Application of the Position to 2017 Ballot Proposal

March 2017- The board decides to support the 2017 ballot proposal. The process of using a board vote to support, oppose or remain neutral was the same process as was used for the 1997 decision and was clearly described in the materials sent to all local Leagues for the 2015 update.

- In 2016 the Board begins discussion of how to apply the existing position to the upcoming ballot proposal.
- The State office prepares and disseminates informational and educational material about the history of the state constitution and the issues presented by the upcoming ballot proposal.
- In connection with these materials,, local Leagues are given the opportunity to submit a response form on their members thoughts on the upcoming 2017 ballot proposal.
- There was no clear agreement either in favor of or in opposition to the ballot proposal.
- The Issues Committee met to consider whether to recommend to the Board that it support, oppose or remain neutral on the 2017 ballot proposition. It recommends that the Board remain neutral
- At its March 2017 meeting the Board considered the recommendation of the Issues Committee. After discussion, during which the views of all of the Board members were solicited and considered, the recommendation was not accepted. A motion was made and passed to support the ballot proposal.