

## Report of the Election Methods Consensus Committee

- Judy Hedden, LWVWA President
- Lucy Copass, LWVWA Board Liaison to the Election Methods Study Committee
- Janet Anderson, LWVWA Election Methods Study Committee Chair

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Members clearly appreciated the continuation of the Study of Election Methods. The Election Methods Committee provided an exceptional level of support, which was very well-received. Local League consensus reports confirmed that additional time and an interactive approach led to a significant increase in member understanding. Many members said that the charts, maps and voting exercise were especially helpful.

Nineteen of twenty-three local Leagues/UALs have participated to date. Of the remaining four, Methow Valley UAL will hold their meeting next week and two others (Mason County and San Juan County) may hold unit meetings in the fall. Clark County had a previous local study on Election Methods a number of years ago and decided that a repetition was not needed. A total of well over 400 League members participated in consensus discussions. The topic drew many non-members to the League meetings as well.

### Analysis of the Consensus Recording Forms:

- Question 1. Do you think proportional representation of voters in “representative” government bodies (councils, legislatures, congress) is a desirable goal? Why or why not?  
18 local Leagues reached a consensus and answered yes to this question.  
(represents approximately 400 members)  
1 local League reached a consensus and answered no to this question.  
(represents 15 members)
- Question 2. To win election to a single office, (mayor, governor) do you think a majority vote requirement is desirable? Why or why not?  
15 local Leagues reached a consensus and answered yes to this question.  
(represents approximately 265 members)  
4 local Leagues did not reach a consensus.  
(represents 92 members)
- Question 3 (Advisory only to LWVUS} Last year members agreed that it would be desirable for state election laws to allow more options for alternative election systems at the state and local level. Would you like to see the same flexibility extended to states for their congressional elections? Why or why not?  
12 local Leagues reached a consensus and answered yes to this question.  
1 local League reached a consensus and answered no to this question.  
6 local Leagues did not reach a consensus.

The Election Methods Consensus Committee is not recommending sending an advisory to LWVUS at the present time. Several Leagues did not have time to respond to the last question. A majority of the responding members agreed, but there was not a strong consensus.

## New Election Method Positions

Washington League members concluded their three-year study of election methods by adopting two new positions which read:

### *The League of Women Voters of Washington:*

- Supports adoption of election methods that produce proportional representation when electing representative government bodies such as councils, legislatures and Congress.
- 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.

In addition to working with members of the legislature for suitable legislation, the League stands willing to help local leagues provide educational programs for students, teachers, and community organizations. For help contact . We shared our charts and study materials with quite a few other members at the National Convention in June.

The above positions will be added to the ones adopted last year <sup>2001</sup> that reads:

### *The League of Women Voters of Washington:*

- Supports state election laws allowing for more options for alternative election systems in governmental jurisdictions at both the state and local level.
- Believes that consideration should be given, when evaluating election systems, to how well they promote "representative-ness," citizen participation and accountability.
- In the event that the primary continues as 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 and encourages minor party participation.
- Supports a presidential primary only if the results play a decisive part in selecting party nominees.



## Positions Adopted Resulting from Last Years' Election Methods Study

### The League of Women Voters of Washington:

- Supports state election laws allowing for more options for alternative election systems in governmental jurisdictions at both the state and local levels.
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- In the event that the primary continues as 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 and encourages minor party participation.
- Supports a presidential primary only if the results play a decisive part in selecting party nominees.

\*\*Summary of terms as described in last year's study

Representative-ness: "The principal difficulty lies, and the greatest care should be employed in constituting this representative assembly. It should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason and act like them." (John Adams) "An essential aspect of Representative-ness is the protection of the right to representation for ethnic, racial and philosophic minorities." Page 27

Accountability: "Democratic theory says that elections foster accountability -- the means by which electorates may hold officials accountable for their performance. While it is true that the structure of government has a large influence on its accountability (or lack thereof), different election methods may also contribute to, or detract from governmental accountability through two related factors: the strength and number of political parties, and the strength of incumbency." Page 27.

Citizen Participation: Election methods and procedures can dramatically affect turnout. In addition to procedures that overtly reduce turnout by making voting harder (barriers to registration, distant polling places, ballots in only language, etc.), election methods and procedures may affect turnout in subtler ways. One example is the "safe district" dominated by one party. Simply put, citizens seem most likely to vote when they feel that their vote is most likely to count (make a difference in the results). Page 30.

## Consensus Questions

1. Do you think proportional representation of voters in "representative" government bodies (councils, legislatures, congress) is a desirable goal? Why or why not?
2. To win election to a single office, (mayor, governor) do you think a majority vote requirement is desirable? Why or why not?
3. (Advisory only to LWVUS} Last year members agreed that it would be desirable for state election laws to allow more options for alternative election systems at the state and local level. Would you like to see the same flexibility extended to states for their congressional elections? Why or why not?

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