



# In Florida League

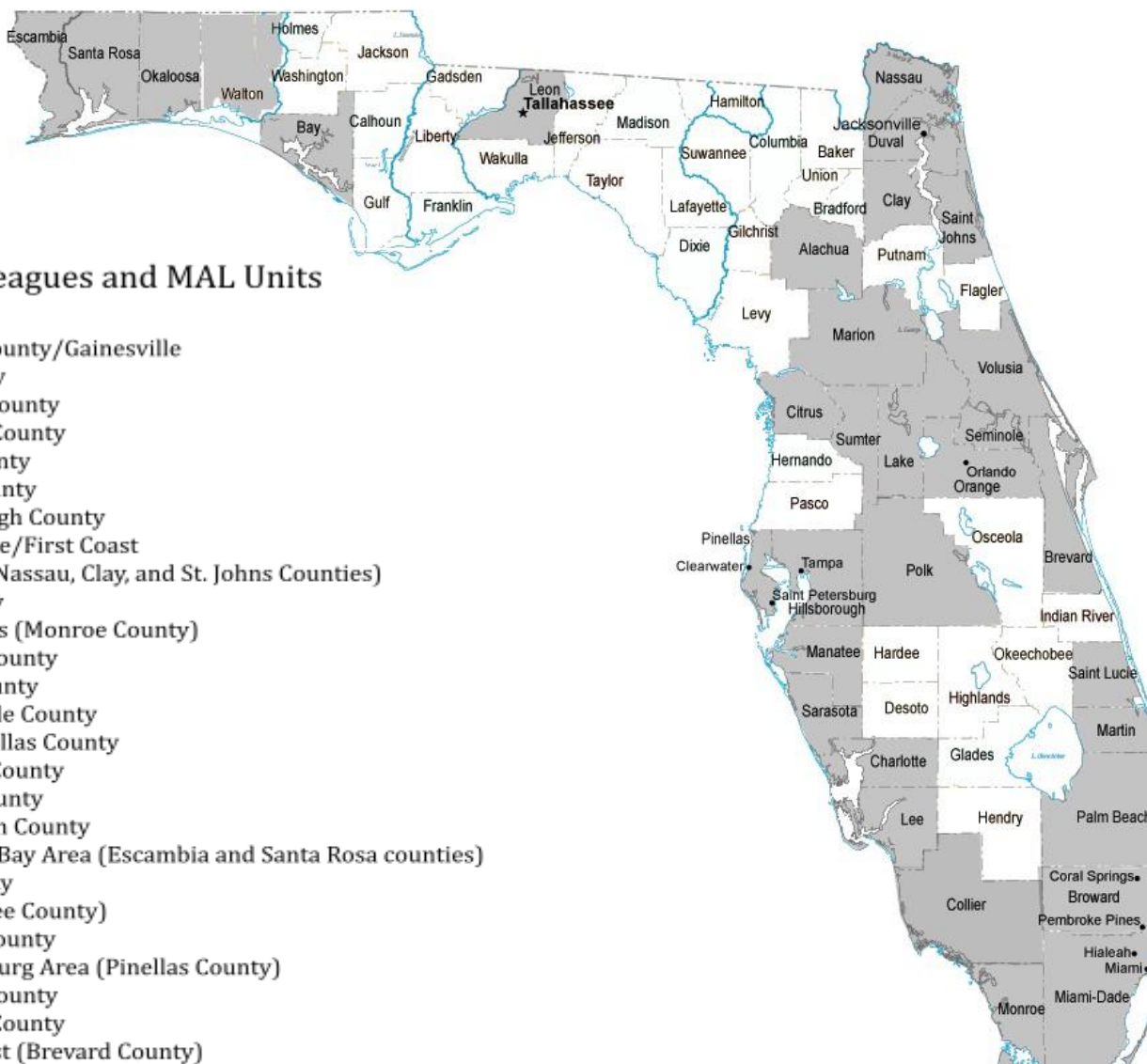
## STUDY & ACTION

2025 – 2027

League of Women Voters of Florida  
P.O. Box 1911 Orlando, FL 32801  
(407) 377-5777

[www.lwvfl.org](http://www.lwvfl.org)

League of Women Voters of Florida, Inc.  
League of Women Voters of Florida Education Fund, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1911 Orlando, FL 32801



## Local Leagues and MAL Units

Alachua County/Gainesville  
Bay County  
Broward County  
Charlotte County  
Citrus County  
Collier County  
Hillsborough County  
Jacksonville/First Coast  
(Duval, Nassau, Clay, and St. Johns Counties)  
Lee County  
Lower Keys (Monroe County)  
Manatee County  
Martin County  
Miami-Dade County  
North Pinellas County  
Okaloosa County  
Orange County  
Palm Beach County  
Pensacola Bay Area (Escambia and Santa Rosa counties)  
Polk County  
Sanibel (Lee County)  
St. Lucie County  
St. Petersburg Area (Pinellas County)  
Sarasota County  
Seminole County  
Space Coast (Brevard County)  
Tallahassee (Leon County)  
The Villages/Tri-County Area (Lake, Sumter, and Marion counties)  
Upper Keys (Monroe County)  
Walton County  
Volusia County

Note: Shaded areas on map indicate counties in which there is a local League or Member-at-Large (MAL) Unit of the League of Women Voters of Florida. In some cases, there are two Leagues within the same county.

# **Table of Contents**

<b>Document Organization</b> .....	3
<b>The Process</b> .....	4
League Principles .....	7
<b>State Program 2025-2027</b> .....	9
<b>Statements of Positions and History</b> .....	18
<b>Government in Florida</b> .....	18
Florida Constitution .....	18
Finance and Taxation .....	41
Election Law .....	52
<b>Education in Florida</b> .....	75
<b>Justice in Florida</b> .....	89
Juvenile Justice in Florida .....	98
<b>Social Policy in Florida</b> .....	101
Children and Families .....	101
Financing and Delivery of Health Care .....	108
Farmworkers .....	114
Libraries .....	115
Immigration .....	117
Gun Violence Prevention .....	120
<b>Sustainability in Florida</b> .....	124
Sustainability .....	124
Energy .....	125
<b>Natural Resources in Florida</b> .....	129
Resource Management .....	129
Land Use .....	129
Florida Freshwater Resources .....	142
Florida Coastal Management (Beaches) .....	146
Environmental Protection and Pollution Control .....	148
Public Participation .....	150
Agriculture Policy .....	151
<b>Legue of Women Voters of the United States Summary of Policy Positions</b> ....	152

## **Document Organization**

"In Florida League Study & Action 2025-2027" consists of the League's process for action, the League's principles, the state program of the League of Women Voters of Florida, and the state program followed by narratives surrounding positions and their history.

The state program is prefaced by League Principles as they govern the organization's overall direction and are historically significant. The narratives provided give background for each position and trace significant actions and achievements.

*The state program which outlines the most recent scope of work for the League was last affirmed by delegates at LWVFL's 40th Biennial State Convention (June 2025).*

# The Process

## **Study and Action**

The words capture the essence of the League of Women Voters. Every member of the League is encouraged to participate in the process of “study and action” in its entirety, from the adoption of a study, through the achievement of a consensus, to its ultimate conclusion with action.

## **State Program**

Members of local Leagues come together to discuss issues of statewide interest and current or potential League concerns. They recommend to their local League boards the issues for study and action. Local League boards consolidate the members’ recommendations and decide which issues and positions have the most support, are most timely and are most appropriate for League activity. They then send their recommendations to the board of the League of Women Voters of Florida (LWVFL). The state board weighs the various recommendations from the local Leagues and decides which issues to recommend (and not recommend) to the state biennial convention (composed of local League delegates) for adoption.

## **Study Consensus or Concurrence Position**

When a program is adopted that includes an issue for study, members first research the issue. Background material on all sides of the issue, a bibliography and consensus questions are furnished by a state study committee as approved by the State Board. These questions, when answered by the membership, may establish a statewide consensus.

Consensus by group discussion is the technique most often used in the League for reaching member agreement. It is a process whereby members participate in a group discussion of an issue. The consensus reached by members through group discussion is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity; rather it is the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions, whether in a membership meeting or a series of membership or unit meetings. The State Board evaluates the conclusions of the local Leagues. Wherever the State Board determines there is substantial agreement (or consensus), a formal LWVFL position is adopted.

Occasionally the concurrence approach is used whereby local Leagues formally agree with a position already arrived at by another organizational unit of the League. Concurrence may be taken with the findings of a resource committee, with a statement formulated by a League board or with positions reached by another League. The subject of concurrence should be one about which members already have a base of knowledge and would be likely to agree. A League cannot take action on an issue until it establishes a position on that issue.

## **Action**

Action can be taken through various means: lobbying elected officials, testimony, letter-writing campaigns, litigation and informing the public, among others.

At the national level, action may be taken based only on national positions. At the state level, action may be taken based on national or state positions. Local action may be taken based on local, state or national positions as long as there is member understanding of how the position relates to the situation and it affects only that local League's area. If the application would have regional implications, all local Leagues in the affected region must agree that the action is appropriate.

At the state level, LWWFL's president, action chair and professional legislative consultant/lobbyist(s) measure proposed legislation against League positions to decide which to support, oppose or ignore. They decide the type and timing of any action. The state board determines LWWFL's stances on state ballot issues and other action possibilities. LWWFL does not take stands on every proposal that falls within League positions. The significance of the proposal in terms of our advocacy agenda, the possible impact of League action, timing and the demands of other League work are some of the factors weighed in decisions. (See discussion below on selecting legislative priorities.)

Effective lobbying on state legislative issues depends on a partnership at all League levels — lobbying in Tallahassee and constituent lobbying at home.

In Tallahassee, the professional consultant and/or LWWFL board members testify at the Capitol and lobby legislators and other government officials through letters, faxes, e-mails, phone calls, office visits and testimony at committee hearings. Day-to-day lobbying of staff members and committees is carried out by the professional LWWFL lobbyist(s), staff or LWWFL volunteer lobbyists.

Lobbying in Tallahassee by LWWFL and the professional lobbyist is vitally important, but direct lobbying of legislators by constituents often is the key to persuading them to vote for the League position. The arguments that League leaders and members make to their respective representatives or senators can make the difference in how they vote. Legislators return to their districts regularly; this is a good time for League members, as individuals, to schedule meetings with them or to talk with them at public events. The LWWFL action chair acts as a liaison between LWWFL lobbyist(s) in Tallahassee and local League members. Local League presidents and/or members may be called before critical votes or when in-depth and ongoing grassroots lobbying is needed from their areas. Local League presidents also will receive fact sheets and/or sample op-ed pieces and other information on issues on which LWWFL is actively lobbying.

## **Produced Materials**

*Capitol Report* is produced by LWVFL through its professional lobbyist before and during the legislative session. This newsletter describes legislation pertaining to LWVFL legislative priorities and gives tips on when and how to take action. It is posted at the LWVFL website ([www.lwvfl.org](http://www.lwvfl.org)) in the Capitol Reports section.

*Action Alerts* are sent to local League members when local lobbying can play a critical role and when member interest and knowledge are high enough to produce an effective response. Local Leagues are urged to take the action requested in Alerts in the name of their local League or as individual members as appropriate. State level positions come from the study and consensus of individual League members, so local League support can prove very effective in lobbying action on these positions.

*The Florida Voter* is produced by LWVFL and often contains legislative information and lobbying opportunities.

## **Local Action on State Issues**

Action on state issues usually is limited to LWVFL priorities. When a local League wishes to take action on a state issue that is not an LWVFL priority, these procedures must be followed:

The local League board should first consult with the state action chair if it wants to lobby its state legislators and then with any other local League boards that share representation in the Legislature.

Make a written request to the LWVFL board describing the contemplated scope of action. Include a statement on how League positions apply to the specific legislation in question. The request should be made in a timely fashion, so the state board will have adequate time for research and decision making.

A local League may want to take action on an LWVFL position at the local and/or regional level. If the local League board determines that its members are knowledgeable on the subject and support the action to be taken, it can undertake action at the local and/or regional level under a state position without prior clearance from the LWVFL board. However, local Leagues may wish to consult with state board members or staff for background on action previously taken at all levels of the League based on a particular position. If the action directly affects other jurisdictions, the League(s) desiring to take the action must obtain clearance from League boards of the other affected jurisdictions.

***NOTE: A local League may not take action in opposition to any LWVFL position.***

### **Local Action Based on National Positions (LWVUS).**

Official local League action with state government officials using national program positions is taken only in response to an Action Alert issued by the state board or if authorized by the state president.

### **Legislative Priorities**

Legislative Priorities are selected each year largely based on recommendations from local Leagues. These items will be given special emphasis by the lobbyists, local Leagues and state board for action during the ensuing legislative session.

The strength and credibility of the League of Women Voters is based on strong grassroots membership understanding and involvement in the entire program and action process. League members influence friends, relatives, and acquaintances in their local communities, as well as national and state legislators.

For better understanding of League program and action, a history of state program can be found later in this text.

For further information on the national program, please consult the latest edition of [LWVUS's Impact on Issues](#). For application of these principles or positions at the local level, please consult with your local League leadership and/or with a state board member.

## **League Principles**

The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States. The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that all powers of the U. S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.

The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination. The League of Women Voters believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.



The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.

The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems and that development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

# **State Program 2025-2027**

*Affirmed by 40th State Convention Delegates on June 7, 2025.*

## **Program Preface**

The League of Women Voters is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.

There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, language, accent, ability status, mental health, educational level or background, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, political perspective or affiliation and/or any other characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity.

## **Government in Florida**

Promote an open government that is responsive to the people of the state.

### **Florida Constitution**

Support basic law that assures a government responsive and accountable to the people of the state. Support retention of the 1968 Florida Constitutional Amendment for home rule by municipalities and counties in the administration of local issues.

#### **Issue for Action:**

- Support compliance with the Fair District Standards for the Redistricting of Congressional and Florida Legislative Districts.

### **Finance and Taxation**

Support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.

## **Election Law**

Support laws and policies to protect, extend and encourage voting rights. Advocate for fair methods of financing political campaigns including public financing.

### **Issues for Action:**

- Support automatic restoration of voting rights for former felony offenders (Returning Citizens), excluding persons convicted of murder or felony sex offenses, after completion of sentence excluding any additional fines or liens not ordered by the sentencing judge.
- Support encouraging the Florida Division of Elections to establish a database or clearing house for Returning Citizens to confirm voter registration eligibility.
- Support notifying registered voters that Vote-By-Mail ballot requests must be renewed.
- Support state funding of return postage for Vote-By-Mail ballots in all counties when Congressional and Florida legislative offices are on the ballot.
- Support Supervisors of Elections notifying voters if their Vote-By-Mail ballot has been accepted or rejected and provide a remedy for ensuring the vote of those whose ballots have been rejected.
- Support Florida's participation in the Electronic Registration Information Center including notification of all citizens who may be eligible but are not registered.
- Support implementation of Election Day Registration as soon as administratively possible.
- Support implementation of automatic voter registration of eligible voters.
- Establish threshold criteria for write-in candidates that mirror current requirements for announced candidates. The presence of write-in candidates as the only opponent should not close the primary.
- Make election voting portable within the county to enable the broadest voter access.
- Support statewide use of an Open Primary election system that would allow for the broadest possible vote participation.
- Support the election of the President and Vice president by direct popular vote. Support the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact.
- Replace Florida's present closed Presidential Preference Primary with an Open Primary system of voting.

- Support the abolishment of Super PACs, the elimination of foreign money investment in US elections, reducing dollar contributions to campaigns and limiting carryover funds from campaigns to PACs.
- Support redistricting preferably being conducted by an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the unit of government, including citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups.

## **Education in Florida**

Support a free public secular school system for Florida with high standards for student achievement and with equality of educational opportunity for all that is financed adequately by the state through an equitable funding formula. Establish a statewide Civics Education Subcommittee under the state Education committee.

### **Issues for Action:**

- Promote adequate and equitable funding of public education by:
  - Using a multiyear approach to bring Florida's total per-pupil funding to at least the median of the national ranking of the states by U.S. Department of Education, providing school districts adequate funding and the flexibility to implement programs and adopt spending plans that best meet their communities' needs.
  - Resolving the inequities in capital improvement funding.
  - Opposing the use of public funding for the expansion of funding of private education, including through voucher programs.
  - Supporting requirements that state and local capital outlay funds and the assets they purchase must be able to be recouped by the school district before capital outlay funding can be released to a charter school.
- Support a curricular framework that includes broad common standards developed by educational experts that serves as a guide to local districts.
- Support the increased oversight of the development and implementation of charter school contracts with regard to administrative fees, facility contracts, teacher salaries and benefits, and instructional innovation, independence of charter board members, and unmet need in the district.
- Support a statewide assessment and accountability system that provides valid data at appropriate intervals to measure student progress for all students and schools that receive public funds directly or indirectly. Data should be used to

identify areas where increased support is needed.

- Support higher standards for early childhood education staff and programs.
- Increase funding for high quality preschool program of certified teachers
- Promote diversity and nondiscrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, citizenship, socio-economic status and ability status in all publicly funded schools, including publicly funded colleges and universities.

## **Justice in Florida**

Support a judicial system that provides a unified court structure, improved provisions for judicial selection and merit retention and equal access to legal services. Support a criminal justice system that emphasizes diversion and deflection, rehabilitation and alternatives to incarceration.

### **Issues for Action:**

- Support juvenile justice actions that emphasize civil citations, not criminal, and increased judicial oversight of direct file of juveniles to adult court.
- Support rehabilitation and other alternatives to incarceration.

## **Social Policy in Florida**

Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice, and the health and safety of all persons.

### **Equality**

#### **Issue for Action:**

- Support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) by the Florida Legislature and passage of a resolution by the U.S. Congress to remove any outstanding deadlines to ratify the ERA.

### **Children and Families**

Support measures to meet special concerns of children and families, including countering intrafamily abuse and providing for safe homes, foster care and shelter care.

**Issues for Action:**

- Support the safe rescue and rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking and the education of the public about this issue.
- Support employment at a livable wage for all workers.
- Support equal pay for women.
- Support better coordination between school and community services in social services, pre-school programs, and after school programs.
- Support measures to maximize eligibility for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and to exclude work requirements for Medicaid recipients.
- Support subsidized quality childcare for low income families.

**Financing & Delivery of Health Care**

Support use of federal, state and local resources to develop programs emphasizing equitable access to high quality comprehensive health care for all and control of costs for the individual.

**Issues for Action:**

- Advocate for Medicaid Expansion.
- Advocate for cost-effective approaches that emphasize prevention and focus on health outcomes.
- Promote oral and behavioral health services and education.
- Support accessibility to care and the right to make private personal reproductive health care decisions.

**Housing**

Protect the Sadowski Fund so it can only be used for affordable housing.

**Farmworkers**

Support measures to provide safe, adequate living and working conditions for farm workers.

**Libraries**

Support full funding of public library systems.

**Immigration**

Support immigration policies that promote reunification of immediate families, meet the

economic, business and employment needs of the United States, and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. Provision should also be made for qualified persons to enter the United States on student visas. Ensure fair treatment under the law for all persons. In transition to a reformed system, support provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.

**Issues for Action:**

- Support granting driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants.
- Support the June 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, the abolishment of quotas, and support sanctuary cities.

## **Gun Violence Prevention**

Support regulations concerning the purchase, ownership, safe storage for unattended guns and use of handguns and long guns that balance as nearly as possible individual constitutional rights with the general interest and welfare of the community.

**Issues for Action:**

- Support changes in law to allow local communities to enact ordinances for any type of gun safety measures in their jurisdiction.
- Support expansion of mandated background checks and three-day waiting periods for ALL gun sales or transfers, including gun shows and unlicensed gun sales, and ensure the state provides all relevant records to the FBI National Instant Criminal Background Check System.
- Support a state ban on all semi- automatic assault style weapons and large capacity feeding devices.
- Support changes in the law to make lying on a background check punishable by law.

## **Sustainability in Florida**

Support governmental action that results in sustainability: Meeting the needs of the present without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Environment, society and the economy must be integrated and balanced to achieve a sustainable Florida.

**Issues for Action:**

- Support public transportation projects which yield multi-modal investments in local and state enhanced infrastructure, especially in low-income areas.
- Support governmental actions that result in sustainability by meeting the needs of the

present without endangering the future.

- Support the adoption of a renewable portfolio standard.
- Support the development of state, regional and local plans to address climate change mitigation and resilience.
- Request the Governor join the US Climate Alliance.
- Request Florida mayors to join the Climate Mayors.
- Support legislation or other measures to put climate change references and language in Florida laws and regulations.

## **Energy**

Support state legislation for energy conservation and greater use of renewable sources such as solar energy.

### **Issues for Action:**

- Continue partnership with FL SUN and other associations to create solar cooperatives and other programs that provide incentives to switch to solar.
- Support state legislation and local policy makers to expand solar and the electrification of transportation.
- Support the adoption of relevant energy alternatives.
- Support public transportation that does not rely on fossil fuels.
- Advocate statewide reduction of greenhouse gas emissions while maintaining a robust economy that is in line with the United Nations (UN) and Paris Accords (i.e., reduction of 45% by 2030 and 100% by 2050).
- Back placing a price on carbon emissions whether cap-and-trade or carbon tax/fee, while ensuring equity in its implementation.

## **Natural Resources in Florida**

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest by recognizing the inter relationship of air quality, energy, land use, waste management and water resources. Promote public understanding and participation in decision making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources. (LWVUS) Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government. (LWVUS)



## **Land Use**

Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government.

### **Issues for Action:**

- Support the preparation and implementation of a new state growth management plan that addresses current needs.
- Support the implementation of the Water and Land Legacy Amendment consistent with the intent of the adopted language.
- Take steps to ensure that land uses are exemplary of environmental justice.

## **Freshwater Resources**

Support public policies that promote conservation of freshwater and its availability for environmental, public supply, agricultural, industrial and mining uses on a priority basis.

### **Issues for Action:**

- Update the study of groundwater resources to ensure they are adequate to meet future needs.
- Support septic to sewer conversion and state tracking of septic inspections.
- Request maximum support for Everglades Agricultural Area funding.
- Support enforcement of agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) regarding releases to surface water.
- Protect our natural springs from pollutants and unsuitable uses. (i.e., commercially bottled water).

## **Coastal Management**

Support intergovernmental stewardship of and fiscal responsibility for the Florida coast, under the management of the state, while recognizing the dominance of nature and the role of the sand transport system.

### **Issues for Action:**

- Advocate for an equitable transition plan to move people from high-risk areas where climate change mitigation is not feasible.
- State support of coastal communities in developing localized responses to Sea Level Rise and salt-water intrusion into drinking water wells.

- Support the protection and restoration of estuaries and wetlands.

## **Environmental Protection and Pollution Control**

Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment. (LWVUS)

### **Issues for Action:**

- Support the ban of advanced well stimulation treatments ("fracking") including but not limited to hydraulic fracturing, acid fracturing, and matrix acidizing.
- Take positions to preserve our wetland ecosystems.
- Discourage use of single-use, non-essential, disposable plastics from fossil fuels.

# Statements of Positions and History

## Government in Florida

Promote an open government that is responsive to the people of the State.

### *Florida Constitution*

The League of Women Voters of Florida, shortly after its organization in 1939 by three existing local Leagues, undertook a comprehensive study of Florida government. As a result, members determined that the two most serious and interrelated problems were the outmoded 1885 Constitution and its resultant malapportioned Legislature. To effect change in Florida government the League seeks reform through the state's:

(1) constitutional amendment process, (2) legislature and (3) courts. In many cases we must use more than one of these avenues.

### **Government Operation**

#### **Legislature Composition**

In 1968-70, fully two-thirds of the League's membership decided that a unicameral system would be superior to a bicameral one in efficiency, economy, simplification of procedures and the pinpointing of responsibility.

Delegates to the LWVFL 1999 Convention dropped, with no opposition, the position on the Unicameral Legislature based on State Board recommendation because:

- The position was developed in 1970 and the current Florida membership had little, if any, interest in supporting this reform. (Nebraska remains the only state with a unicameral legislature.)
- During the 1998 Constitution Revision Commission (CRC) the idea was raised but neither LWVFL nor any other organization supported it. The Florida Legislature has shown no inclination in that direction.
- Florida has a great many other governmental problems in need of attention such as reapportionment, fairer election laws, legislative rules reform, campaign finance reform, and HAVA implementation, to name a few.

The Board decided that this position be dropped until such time that there seemed to be a political climate for such a change. If that should occur, the issue could be studied to give the membership the opportunity to take a fresh look at the issue.

## **Legislative Rules**

A priority issue on which the League lobbied during the '96-'97 Legislature was legislative rules reform. Both houses adopted new rules that incorporated many suggestions from Common Cause and LWWFL. The new House rules seemed excellent at first glance, but there were loopholes that allowed the speaker to take up bills on the floor with less than the 72-hours' notice expected.

Legislators did take more time on bills, there were fewer sneaky amendments at the end and fewer bills passed overall than in past years. The Senate's rules changes were not as extensive as those made in the House. More reform is needed.

For the second year, LWWFL pushed for further changes to the House and Senate rules and procedures. Unfortunately, little change took place in 1998-1999 and focus was on the implementation of rules and procedures begun during the 1997 session.

## **Redistricting and Reapportionment**

### **1980s**

The Florida Legislature is responsible for dividing the state into voting districts for Congress and the Legislature that reflect changes in population after each census. Historically, this has been a political process controlled by the party currently in the majority; district lines are drawn to maintain the majority and protect incumbents. The League believes that it is a conflict of interest for the Legislature to draw its own district boundaries.

During 1982 the Florida Legislature redrew the boundaries of both congressional and legislative districts. LWWFL supported the lines drawn for both sets of districts but opposed the contention of the Florida Senate that only half its members had to seek election in the fall of 1982. The League successfully argued its objections as an amicus curiae before the Florida Supreme Court in In Reapportionment Law, SJR 1E.

Reapportionment positions upon which the League acted were derived from both LWWFL positions and principles and the LWWUS position on apportionment. The League supports single-member election districts that are equal in population, that provide access for minorities, and, when possible, take local characteristics such as political and geographical boundaries into consideration.

### **1990s**

Reapportionment was one of the League's 1992 legislative priorities. The League monitored the process and offered testimony at public hearings around the state in support of the provision of opportunities for citizen participation. The extensive political battles in the Legislature over reapportionment/redistricting propelled the League into a decision to initiate a petition drive for a constitutional amendment placing redistricting/reapportionment in the hands of an independent commission. The decision to act in support of the 1970/1977 position was announced at the 1992 LWWFL Council. Subsequently, a coalition was formed with Common Cause for the purposes of writing a valid petition and organizing the petition

drive. There was considerable hope that the 1993 Legislature would produce a joint resolution that would be satisfactory to the League and thus make a petition drive unnecessary. However, the House-passed measure did not fit League positions, although the Senate's did. No compromise was reached.

## **2000s**

In preparation for the 2002 reapportionment, two prominent leaders, a Democrat and a Republican, joined to create two proposed redistricting amendments to the Florida Constitution and a signature-gathering campaign named People Over Politics (POP). The League and 11 other organizations joined the group in 1999. The League worked diligently, but insufficient signatures were obtained to place the issue on the 2002 ballot. The drive was cancelled.

But the 2001 Legislature-appointed redistricting committee did hold 20 public hearings around the state to educate the public about the process and to hear public testimony concerning the required 2002 reapportionment. League members spoke at each of the hearings, urging formation of an independent commission to draw the lines for compact and contiguous districts. However, the map drawn by the Legislature was again contentious and resulted in many changes in boundaries and many strangely configured districts.

In 2003 the Committee for Fair Representation again proposed two constitutional amendments to establish an independent, nonpartisan reapportionment commission. The League supported these proposed amendments and local Leagues again gathered signatures. The amendments did not reach the 2004 ballot.

In early 2005, the League helped to create the non-partisan Committee for Fair Elections for another citizen petition initiative campaign. Local Leagues gathered many of the needed 750,000 signed petitions to put this proposal on the 2006 ballot including establishing an independent commission that would draw districts in time for the 2008 elections. However, in March 2006, the Florida Supreme Court struck the proposed amendment from the ballot ruling in part that it included more than one subject. The League and its partners were very disappointed with the Court decision; however, this was the first time that the Court had ruled on any redistricting amendment. More importantly, the court's ruling provided a blueprint for writing amendment(s) in an acceptable form.

By fall 2007, the League was back in the redistricting reform game as a steering committee member for FairDistrictsFlorida.org that is proposing two amendments to the Florida Constitution, which would establish standards for drawing congressional and legislative voting districts. Districts could not be drawn to favor or disfavor an incumbent or political party and would be required to ensure that racial and language minorities would have the opportunity to fully participate in the political process and elect representatives of their choice. Also, all voting districts would need to be equal in population, compact, contiguous and utilize existing geographical and political boundaries.

Local Leagues are once again gathering signatures to get these citizen-initiated petitions on the 2010 ballot.

In the fall of 2009, the League was still working with the Fair Districts Florida organization, and, at this point, 98% of the petitions needed to get the amendments on the ballot had been garnered. Upon its founding in Florida, in 1939, the League of Women Voters cited the “malapportioned legislature” as a serious problem.

### **2010's**

Finally, in 2010, the citizens of Florida voted to remedy the situation by voting for Amendments 5 and 6; these amendments require that districts be contiguous, compact, make use of existing city, county, and geographical boundaries where feasible, and the districts may not favor or disfavor incumbents or political parties. Also, districts may not deny racial or language minorities the equal opportunity to participate in the political process. 63% of voting citizens voted for the amendments in November.

On the way to passage of the amendments, the 2010 legislature placed a “redistricting amendment” of their own on the ballot; if all three of the amendments were passed by the voters, the legislature’s Amendment 7 would essentially nullify Amendments 5 and 6. However, the Florida Supreme Court removed the amendment from the ballot along with two others placed there by the legislature.

While the former Governor had sent the amendments to the Department of Justice for pre-clearance--a requirement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, one of the early actions the new Governor took was to withdraw the request. LWVFL and NAACP wrote to the Governor, asking him to resubmit the amendments. One of the amendments was already the target of a lawsuit filed by two U.S. representatives from Florida; they charged that the amendment violated the voting rights laws. The Florida House of Representatives signed onto the lawsuit.

Midway through the legislative session, the State Senate President and the Speaker of the House resubmitted the amendments for federal approval but suggested that the amendments could harm minority voting rights in Florida. The U.S. Department of Justice gave the greenlight to the amendments a few weeks later, saying that the agency could not find any reason why the Voting Rights Act would bar Florida from using the new standards for redistricting.

A Senate Redistricting Committee met several times during the session; while the House had a Chair for the House Committee, committee members were not named until very late in the session. However, the House did set up a website where citizens could create their own maps; the Senate also had a similar website. The League supported two bills filed during the session, one that would speed up the timeline for the redistricting process by requiring the legislature to complete its plans sooner and the other to require that drafts of redistricting plans be considered public record in order to ensure transparency in the process. The bills did not pass.

A big concern for the people who worked on redistricting was the timeline the legislature set up for drawing maps and receiving suggestions. Both houses joined in visiting twenty-six different areas around the state to receive public testimony; however, there were no maps on which to comment. These “listening” tours ran from June to September. The maps would not be drawn until 2012. According to the Florida Constitution, the maps are to be drawn during the legislative session. However, many citizens indicated that tentative maps could be ready to discuss early in the session; the legislature was scheduled to meet from January 2012 to March 2012. Once legislative maps are drawn, they are submitted to the Attorney General who has 15 days to submit them to the Florida Supreme Court. The Court would hear arguments from entities opposed to the maps and has thirty days to make a judgment. If the Court declares the maps invalid, the Governor has five days to call the legislature back into a special session to last no longer than fifteen days. If the revised maps are declared invalid by the Court, the Court then draws the districts. Once maps are approved by the Court, they go on to the Department of Justice which has sixty days in which to determine their validity. Citizens were concerned that the new districts would be drawn so late that challengers would be at a distinct disadvantage as would voters who would not know which district they were in or who was running for the legislature. If maps were not presented before March 9, there would be a possibility that consideration by the Court and DOJ could go past the qualifying deadline of June 4-June 8 for the November 12, 2012 election.

Here we are, five years after the redistricting amendments were passed by the Florida electorate, and the problem of gerrymandered districts has not been settled. The ensuing years have seen Congressional districts approved by law- makers in 2012 overthrown by the Court. Most of the early summer in 2014 was spent in the Circuit court where it was discovered that party operatives were involved in drawing the Congressional and state Senate districts. The Florida Supreme Court ruled that lawmakers could be forced to testify about the redistricting process, although they are usually exempt from speaking about their official duties in the courts. While the Congressional map had been sent to the Supreme Court, the state Senate map was still opposed by the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, and a group of Florida citizens. A court date had been set, but the leaders of the Senate agreed that the districts had been gerrymandered and agreed to go into special session to remedy the problem. By now, we were well into 2015 and new maps had still not been drawn and approved for the 2016 elections. House and Senate leaders did not come to an agreement on maps for the Florida Senate, and, in November 2015, after a third special session for the 2015 legislature, there is no official Congressional or Florida Senate map. Redistricting will now be a matter for the court to decide. One interesting note -- a bill has been filed that would require redistricting in Florida to be done by an independent commission. As this Study & Action goes to print, Leon County Circuit Judge George Reynolds has rejected a plan put forward by Senate Republican leaders as the best configuration of the chamber's 40 seats. Instead, he accepted the Congressional and State Senate maps offered by the League of Women Voters of Florida and Common Cause. The Senate has decided not to appeal the decision. After four years of court battles, Fair

Districts has prevailed.

## **2020s**

In 2021, Florida League Convention delegates voted to add “Ensuring that Fair District Standards are adhered to for the Redistricting of Congressional and Florida Legislative Districts” to the state program in preparation for the 2022 redistricting cycle. In 2025, this statement was revised by Convention delegates to state: Support compliance with the Fair District Standards for the Redistricting of Congressional and Florida Legislative Districts. The word “ensure” implies a degree of certainty or guarantee which is beyond the scope of the League, but the League can support compliance of Fair District Standards.

In 2023, Florida League Convention delegates voted to support agreeing to concurrence with the LWVUS’s position redistricting preferably being vested by an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the unit of government, including citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups. *This concurrence was supported by Study and Action of LWV-Arizona, California, Colorado and Michigan*

## **Constitution Revision**

By 1952, years of study produced a yardstick for a good constitution. (See box page 10.) In 1964 voters approved a League-backed amendment permitting a complete revision of the Constitution. A 37-member commission submitted a draft to the 1967 Legislature.

Local Leagues reaffirmed the 1952 yardstick. It was used as a basis for all League statements to the Commission. Local Leagues studied the executive, judicial, tax, local government and amending articles to reach positions needed for responding to the Legislature’s review of the proposed Constitution.

The Constitution approved by voters in 1968 contained basic changes and became more concise and better organized. The League actively supported the ballot issues, which passed. LWVFL continues to seek improvements in the state’s basic document.

In 1977 LWVFL participated as amicus curiae in a suit before the Florida Supreme Court to determine the proper time to appoint members of the new Constitution Revision Commission. The decision of the Court supported the League’s contention that Commission members could be chosen in the 30 days following the legislative adjournment in 1977. The appointments for the 1977 Constitution Revision Commission included the LWVFL president and another Board member as an alternate. Throughout 1977-78 the League lobbied the Commission on League positions that had been reviewed and reaffirmed with one exception: The previously held position calling for no constitutional debt limits was dropped.

During the 1997-98 Constitution Revision Commission’s term, LWVFL representatives spoke at all 12 hearings around Florida on ten subjects and lobbied commissioners during the committee meetings in Tallahassee. Among the issues on which the League had



positions were cabinet reform, merit selection and retention of judges, environmental protection, gun control, declaration of rights, education, equalization of ballot access, and campaign finance reform. Of nine revisions placed on the 1998 ballot by the CRC, eight passed, including all that the League supported – representing phenomenal success. This was in contrast to 1978 when none of the CRC's proposals passed.

The Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, meeting in 2008, proposed seven constitutional amendments; three were removed from the ballot following rulings by the Florida Supreme Court. One of those removed would have eliminated state required school property tax and would replace it with equivalent state revenues to fund education; a second required 65% of school funding to be spent on classroom instruction. However, the latter amendment would also delete the prohibition against using revenue from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.

The third amendment, which addressed religious freedom, would have allowed vouchers for religious schools, an issue previously declared unconstitutional by the Florida Supreme Court. Another amendment would have allowed local governments to levy a local tax to support Community Colleges; it did make the ballot but was defeated. An amendment that would assess working waterfront property based upon its current use made the ballot and was passed. Another amendment proposed by the commission gives a property tax exemption to perpetually conserved lands; it also made the ballot and passed. The League opposed this amendment since it also addressed land temporarily placed in easement and did not spell out what the ramifications would be if and when the land was taken out of easement. The amendment also places a hardship on some rural counties where much of the land is placed in easement; the tax base is reduced considerably.

The 2009 legislature proposed two constitutional amendments. The first would require the legislature to provide an additional homestead property exemption for members of the U.S. military or military reserves, the Coast Guard or its reserves, or the Florida National Guard who received a homestead exemption and were deployed in the previous year on active duty outside the continental United States, Alaska, or Hawaii in support of military operations to be designated by the Legislature. The exemption amount will be based on the number of days the person was deployed during the previous calendar year.

A second amendment reduced the maximum annual increase in the assessed values of non-homestead property to 5% annually. It will also reduce the just value of a first-time homestead by 25% up to \$100,000 for those persons who have not owned a home during the preceding 8 years; this amount decreases in each succeeding year for 5 years and is not available in the 6th year.

Both of these amendments will appear on the 2010 ballot. Another amendment on the 2010 ballot will repeal the "Florida Election Campaign Financing Act" and remove the requirement of public financing of campaigns of candidates for statewide office who agree to campaign spending limits. If approved by the voters, the amendment passed by the electorate in 1998 that instituted public financing will be repealed. During testimony in

the session, the program was billed as “Welfare for Politicians” since the 2005 legislature had more than doubled the amounts of money that could be raised by candidates. In both the 2008 and 2009 legislative sessions, the League lobbied against repealing the original amendment but, instead, asked for the limits to be lowered to pre-2005 amounts. Hearings on the bill began every early in the year, passing through committees as early as February 2009. The League, along with Common Cause testified against the bill throughout the months of February and March. However, by March 29, the joint resolution was agreed to by both houses. There is one caveat; if the amendment is not supported by 60% of the electorate, the spending caps on the original amendment will revert to pre-2005 caps.

Of the three aforementioned amendments, the additional homestead property exemption for members of the military deployed overseas was passed by the voters.

The amendment that would reduce the maximum annual increase in assessed values of on homestead property was removed from the ballot by the Supreme Court.

The amendment to repeal Campaign Finance Reform was defeated by the voters.

The 2012 Florida election ballot contained 10 proposed amendments to the Florida Constitution; none were citizen initiatives. While citizen initiatives are limited to 75 words and may only address one subject, the legislature is not held to the same standards; one of the amendments addressed four different issues. This led to lengthy ballots and long lines at the polling places, and once again, the election process in Florida was questioned by the rest of the country.

Amendment 1 attempted to exempt Floridians from a provision in the federal health care law known as the individual mandate; it requires all Americans to have health insurance by 2014 or face penalties. In June 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the individual mandate is constitutional, so voting for the amendment had no practical implications except to indicate that a majority of Florida’s voters were in favor of or opposed to the individual mandate. The amendment was defeated; 48.5% of voters supported it. Florida law requires a 60% passage rate for all constitutional amendments.

Amendment 2 extended a homestead property tax discount to all disabled veterans who are Florida residents; previously, an amendment was passed that extended the discount only to those veterans who were Florida residents when they entered the military. The amendment passed with 63% of the vote.

Amendment 3 (TABOR) limited state government revenues. Colorado is the only state that has passed this type amendment, and it has suffered devastating cuts to major areas of spending, including schools, universities, and health care. The Senate President had been working to get the amendment on the ballot since 2008. Voters rejected the amendment; support was just 42%.

Amendment 4 addressed four different property tax limitations and reduced assessment increases for non-homestead property in the state. Voters rejected the amendment with 43% voting in favor of it.

Amendment 5 would require Senate confirmation of Supreme Court Justices, give legislators more control over any changes to the rules governing the court system, and direct the Judicial Qualifications Commission, which investigates misconduct complaints, to make its files available to the Speaker of the House even if there is no question of impeachment of the judge. Voters soundly defeated the amendment with just 36.9% supporting it.

Amendment 6 would prohibit public funding of abortions and nullify a privacy clause in the state constitution. Federal law already prohibits the use of federal funds for most abortions; this amendment would enshrine the prohibition in the state constitution. It would also eliminate the use of the privacy clause in abortion cases before the courts. The amendment garnered just 44.9% of the vote and did not pass.

Amendment 7 was removed from the ballot by the Supreme Court. Recent Florida law allows the Attorney General to rewrite the ballot language and the amendment is reinstated on the ballot. So, Amendment 7 is now Amendment 8.

Amendment 8 would repeal a 126-year-old provision in the state constitution that prohibits taxpayer funding of religious institutions. Currently school vouchers may not be used to attend religious schools. The Florida Supreme Court has ruled that using public funds for a voucher program to allow children to attend private or parochial schools is unconstitutional; the League of Women Voters of Florida filed an amicus brief in the lawsuit resulting in the afore mentioned decision. With just 44.5% of voters supporting the amendment, it failed.

Amendment 9 extends a property tax exemption to the surviving spouse of military veteran or first responder. State law has granted full homestead property tax relief to surviving military spouses since 1997; this amendment would enshrine the law in the state constitution and extend it to surviving spouses of first responders. The amendment passed with 61% of the vote.

Amendment 10 would raise the current tangible personal property tax exemption for businesses from \$25,000 to

\$50,000. This would affect county property tax income; the estimate was that local property tax revenues would be reduced by \$61 million over the first three years of implementation. This amendment was supported by 45.5% of the voters; it failed.

Amendment 11 would allow counties to grant a full homestead exemption to certain low-income seniors; local governments would need a super-majority vote to grant the exemption. The amendment passed with 61% of the vote. Amendment 12 would change the method for choosing the student representative who serves on the Board of Governors of the State University System. The amendment failed, with just 41.5% of voters supporting the measure. Based on League positions, the League of Women Voters of Florida opposed all eleven of the amendments.

Amendments 2, 9, and 11 passed. The voters rejected the other eight.

# **Yardstick for a Good State Constitution**

## **A Good State Constitution:**

Must not conflict with any provision of the Federal Constitution.

Should be a simple, understandable and integrated statement of basic law, free from obsolete and statutory detail; a flexible instrument free from unsound limitations binding upon the Legislature.

Should have clearly defined lines of authority and responsibility.

Should provide for a representative Legislature based essentially on population with self-executing reapportionment.

Should establish a uniform system of courts adapted to the expanding needs of a growing state.

Should have general provisions under which cities and counties may achieve self-government.

Should establish state standards for finance and taxation that meet the requirements of modern society.

Should provide for a merit system for the selection, retention and promotion of state personnel.

Should provide for meeting the increasingly extensive social and economic problems that affect the general welfare.

Should provide for a system of free public education with equality of opportunity for all.

Should include amendment processes that are in harmony with the other provisions of the Constitution. (1952)

## **Ethics Reform**

2012 brought new leadership to the legislature; the new Speaker of the House and Senate President listed ethics reform, campaign finance reform, and election law reform as priorities.

The Senate Ethics and Elections committee produced a bill that the League supported. Some of the good things the bill does:

- Bars elected officials from taking advantage of their positions to get taxpayer funded jobs
- Increases the ability of the Ethics Commission to collect fines that are owed
- Blocks lawmakers from lobbying state agencies for two years after they leave office
- Requires financial disclosure forms to be put online and requires the Ethics Commission to develop an electronic filing system for financial disclosure

- Allows referral of ethics complaints from the Governor's office, FDLE, state attorneys and the U.S. Attorney
- Requires four hours of ethics training per year for constitutional officers

The League was opposed to the section of the bill that gives public officials thirty days to go back and fix an error on a financial disclosure form after an ethics complaint has been filed and not face a penalty. The bill was signed into law by the Governor on May 1, 2013.

This legislation will strengthen the state's Ethics Commission; it has been viewed as weak and possessing little power to enforce fines. With the passage of this law, the Commission will be able to garnish the wages of persons who are in violation of the Ethics law, and the time period for collecting these fines has been extended from four years to twenty years. In the past, the Ethics Commission has had little power to collect fines from elected officials and has written off \$1,000,000 in the past ten years. Another plus for the commission is allowing referrals to come from several entities and not just private citizens. While the Commission would like to be able to initiate investigations on their own, the legislature was not prepared to grant this authority. This was a breakthrough year for ethics reform; hopefully, the new law will help to raise Florida national image in the area of ethics.

Beginning January 1, 2015, the bill requires elected municipal officers to complete four hours of ethics training each calendar year; that meets the same requirements as ethics training for constitutional officers. The term "constitutional officers" includes the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Attorney General, the Chief Financial Officer, the Commissioner of Agriculture, state attorneys, public defenders, sheriffs, tax collectors, property appraisers, supervisors of elections, clerks of the circuit court, county commissioners, district school board members, and superintendents of schools. Prior to 2015, city commissioners were exempt from ethics training.

The bill also requires each officer who is subject to the ethics training requirement, including constitutional officers and elected municipal officers, to certify on the officer's financial disclosure that he or she has completed the required training. Failure to affirm completion of annual ethics training does not constitute an immaterial, inconsequential, or de minimis error or omission. Therefore, after August 31, an officer would not be permitted to "cure" the failure to affirm completion of the training on a financial disclosure if a complaint is filed regarding the failure.

Lastly, the bill provides that it is the Legislature's intent that a constitutional officer or elected municipal officer required to complete the ethics training receive the training as close as possible to the date he or she assumes office. The bill requires the Commission on Ethics ("Commission") to initiate proceedings, without having first received a complaint, against a person who has failed or refused to file an annual financial disclosure and has accrued the maximum automatic fine. If the Commission initiates a proceeding, it must determine whether the failure to file was willful and, if so, recommend removal from office of certain persons.

The term “constitutional officers” includes the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Attorney General, the Chief Financial Officer, the Commissioner of Agriculture, state attorneys, public defenders, sheriffs, tax collectors, property appraisers, supervisors of elections, clerks of the circuit court, county commissioners, district school board members, and superintendents of schools.

Currently, there have been two additional ethics bills filed in the Senate for the 2016 session, one labeled “The Florida “Anti-Corruption Act.”

### **Right to Speak**

In 2008, a bill entitled “Vox Populi”, or the Voice of the People was introduced in the Florida House; its companion bill in the Senate died in committee. The bill would have allowed Florida citizens to be heard at public meetings. The Sunshine Law mandates that meetings be open but does not give citizens a right to speak at those meetings.

In 2011, a new bill was offered in the Florida Senate that would allow citizens to be heard before decision making by a local government or board. While the bill passed the Senate, the House did not take up the bill.

The League has supported this legislation since it first appeared in 2008, and continued to support it in 2012, when it was again introduced in the Senate. In 2013, the bill was passed by both houses and signed into law by the Governor.

### **Merit Selection and Retention of Judges**

League study of the judicial system in 1967 resulted in support of a merit selection and retention plan for judges. The 1968 Constitutional Revision Commission did not deal with the judiciary since Article V was to be developed by a special commission and was voted on in a special election in March 1972.

Article V went into effect in 1973 and provided for merit selection only if the governor appointed a judge to a vacancy. In 1975 when impeachment proceedings were brought against two Supreme Court justices and a third justice resigned under pressure, the League, with the Florida Bar Association, the press and the governor, persuaded the Legislature to put a more stringent selection process amendment on the ballot in November 1976. The League’s action campaign helped passage by 3 to 1 of the current system of merit selection and retention of appellate judges including those on the Supreme Court.

The passage in 1998 of a constitutional amendment shifts the major costs of Florida’s judicial system from the counties to the state, freeing more local revenue for local purposes; increases county court judges’ terms from four to six years, consistent with circuit judges; and allows voters to decide whether to maintain the election system for trial judges in their county and/or judicial circuit or whether to have them appointed by the governor and subject to subsequent retention elections under a system of merit selection (also allows for opting out later). In November 2000, voters statewide voted county by county on merit selection and retention of county and circuit court judges; in

each county the vote was to retain the election system. The issue may be reconsidered by initiative in any county in 2006 [and it wasn't] or every four years after that. The League remains in support of extending merit selection to include circuit and county court trial judges. (Also see the section on Justice in Florida, page 49.)

The 2001 Legislature gave the governor the power to make all appointments to the nine-member Judicial Nominating Commissions that in turn select nominees for openings in trial and appellate courts, with the requirement that four be chosen from names submitted by the Florida Bar. Previously, the Bar selected three, the governor selected three and those six selected three non-attorneys for the balance of the panel. All appointments to fill judicial vacancies are made by the governor.

In September 2006, the Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice established a Committee on Judicial Evaluations to extend to June 2008, consisting of eight members from the judiciary, eight members from The Florida Bar at large and five lay members. The Chief Justice appointed the state League president as one of the lay members. The Chief Justice directed this Committee to study judicial evaluation in connection with the selection and retention of judicial officials and to make recommendations as to the creation of a proper system, process and criteria for the evaluation of judges. After three intense quarterly meetings and in-depth analysis of state by state systems and processes, the Committee "sunset" itself in June 2007. By majority vote, it recommended no changes to the current judicial evaluation system. The majority of the Committee rejected the establishment of an Independent Judicial Qualifications Commission as used in 23 other states that would (1) systemically evaluate judicial performance for self-improvement of the justice and the courts (2) provide performance information to voters in retention elections. The LWVFL president voted with the minority.

After the Supreme Court struck down three constitutional amendments proposed by the legislature in 2010, the Speaker of the House proposed legislation during the 2011 session that would change the makeup of the court. There no longer would be seven justices; instead there would be ten justices, and five would hear civil cases while the other five dealt with criminal cases. An earlier plan would have done away with the Judicial Nominating Commission, but that was removed from the bill when, statewide, judges and lawyers protested the move. Under the new plan, the Florida Senate would have to confirm all appointments to the Supreme Court. Also, confidential records of complaints against judges would be available to the House, even if there is no threat of impeachment.

While the attempt to set up two separate courts failed, a proposed amendment giving legislators more control over any changes to the rules governing the court system and directing the Judicial Qualifications Commission to make all files on misconduct complaints available to the Speaker of the House, whether or not there is a question of impeachment, did pass and appeared on the 2012 ballot. It did not get the required 60% of the vote. Also, on the ballot were the names of three Supreme Court judges up for retention; they were all retained on the Court.

## **Initiative Process**

The 1968 Constitution Revision Commission placed on the ballot the constitutional citizen petition initiative procedure, which was supported by LWVFL. The amendment passed allowing citizens to petition for amendments to the Constitution. In 1972 the League supported a successful campaign to allow an initiative amendment to change more than one section of the Constitution so long as it dealt with only a single subject.

The first successful attempt to place an initiative petition on the ballot occurred in 1976 when the governor, aided by the League and other citizen organizations, obtained sufficient petition signatures for the Sunshine Amendment. A majority (4-to-1) of Florida voters ratified this amendment provision for ethics and full financial disclosure by elected state and constitutional officers.

Nine proposed revisions to the Constitution were on the ballot in November 1978, including a failed initiative petition to allow casino gambling in a limited area of the southeast Florida coast. Revisions to the tax article of the Constitution were opposed by the League.

In 1980, a total of 12 proposed amendments were offered to voters. The only proposal rejected, a measure to abolish the Constitution Revision Commission, was opposed by LWVFL, among the first and the most visible organizations to announce opposition.

In 1982 the League opposed a proposed constitutional amendment that would have weakened the Sunshine Amendment. The measure would have permitted legislators to become paid lobbyists immediately upon leaving office by filing a financial disclosure statement rather than having to wait a required two-year period. The League joined former Gov. Reubin Askew and Common Cause in *Askew vs. Firestone*, which asked the Florida Supreme Court to declare the ballot wording unconstitutional and to strike the measure from the ballot. The Court ruled in favor of the League's position.

The single-subject requirement has subsequently caused the Florida Supreme Court to remove several proposed initiative amendments from the ballot including a 1984 amendment to limit revenue expenditures at all levels of state and local government.

In 1989, League testimony supported limiting the terms of Cabinet members, but the bill did not pass. The League did not take a position on term limitations for the "Eight is Enough" amendment of 1992 (limiting terms to eight years) because, while LWVUS has a position opposing term limits for the U.S. Congress, LWVFL has positions in favor of limited terms for the governor and Cabinet. Since the amendment was adopted in 1992, members of the Cabinet and Senate have been limited to two terms (eight years), and members of the House to four terms (eight years).

Voters were presented with 10 amendments in 1992. They approved a League-backed amendment that granted public access to records and meetings of the executive, judicial and legislative branches of state government and other governmental entities. This amendment corrected the legal condition brought about by the 1991 Florida Supreme



Court decision that held that the open records law did not cover the governor, Cabinet members, judges or legislators because they are constitutional officers. The amendment allowed the legislators, by simple majority, to create new exemptions for themselves until July 1, 1993.

In 1994 the League joined with others in a Florida Supreme Court challenge to the way signatures for the four Tax Cap Inc. petition initiatives were collected. Tax Cap Inc., funded by the Florida sugar industry and other corporations, paid petition gatherers to collect signatures, mailed huge numbers of copies of the petition to targeted areas, and used, in the opinion of the League, misleading forms and tactics.

While acknowledging that the integrity of the initiative process was in question, the Court concluded this was an issue the Legislature should resolve by appropriate statutory provisions. Additionally, LWVFL was party to briefs filed with the Supreme Court challenging placement of the four Tax Cap Inc. petition initiatives on the ballot. Three, including a property rights amendment, were removed by the Court, but the revenue limits amendment was placed on the ballot and approved by voters. This amendment made a basic change in the petition initiative process by allowing petitions involving limiting government revenue to address more than one subject.

At the 1995 LWVFL Convention delegates adopted a study of the process and impact of citizen initiative on the state Constitution. In December 1995 the LWVFL Board announced a position that reaffirmed support for the constitutional citizen petition initiative and established support for the statutory citizen petition initiative. Also, a number of criteria for affecting the process were delineated. (See Art. XI Amendments under Florida Constitution Positions page 17.)

The 1997 Legislature passed a bill requiring that sponsors of initiative petitions who pay signature gatherers must notify the Division of Elections of the name and address of each petition gatherer being used and prohibits those sponsors from filing the undue burden oath. Also, in agreement with the League's position, the bill requires petition gatherers to put their names and addresses on each petition form gathered and provides a penalty for signing another's name or a fictitious name to a petition.

In the ensuing years, citizens, frustrated by a Legislature apparently unwilling or unable to address specific concerns, have increasingly resorted to the initiative process to force the Legislature to deal with the issue. Often the resulting petitions address issues that should more properly be dealt with by statutory law and are inappropriate for inclusion in a Constitution. Also, the use of paid signature gatherers, although judged legal, has made it much easier for well financed initiatives to reach the ballot.

In 2003 and 2004, the League worked with a coalition of groups opposing efforts to restrict the citizens' ability to amend the Constitution through the initiative process. As the 2004 session closed, the Florida Legislature hoped to discourage the onslaught of citizen petition initiatives, especially those proposed by special interest groups, by proposing several ballot initiatives. It proposed a constitutional amendment, which the League opposed but voters passed, that moved the deadline for collecting initiative

signatures from August to February. Other efforts to reform the initiative process died as a result of a power struggle between the House and Senate leadership.

In the 2005 session, reform efforts gained stronger support from legislators. LWVFL gave testimony at hearings and committee meetings opposing all of the bills proposed concerning the initiative process because they would have diminished citizens' constitutional rights.

All attempts to place new restrictions on the citizen initiative process died on the calendar on the final day with one significant exception. The Legislature passed a proposed constitutional amendment for the November 2006 ballot that requires any future amendments to the Constitution to pass by a 60 percent rather than a majority vote. The League proactively participated in a Vote NO campaign to defeat this amendment. Voters passed the amendment ironically by less than 60 percent.

Again, in the 2006 session, the League defeated four anti-petition-gathering bills working with the statewide coalition Save the Voters Voice to keep the citizen initiative and petition-gathering processes intact.

However, during the 2007 session, opponents of the citizen initiative process, emboldened by the passage of the 60 percent rule by the voters, expanded their attacks on the initiative process. The League and its allies pulled out all stops to defeat legislation that established a revocation process for citizens who had signed petitions and allowed businesses to selectively prohibit citizen petition drives on their property. The legislation passed. The League was able to savor one small victory in 2007. The Senate Committee on Judiciary staff did research options for authorizing citizens to propose and adopt statutes, including consulting with the League. Their findings, although not totally supported by the League, were not included in any 2007 bills. Yet the concept of creating a statutory initiative process, a recommendation that the League has repeatedly offered, was now being endorsed by other groups and discussed in the Legislature.

## **Gambling**

An initiative petition on the November 1978 ballot to allow casino gambling in a limited area of the southeast Florida coast failed. Casino gambling by county referendum was one of five amendments on the 1986 ballot. As a party to the No Casinos campaign, the League worked to successfully defeat the initiative. The League also opposed the 1986 amendment to create a state-operated lottery, which passed. The League monitored the legislative committees in charge of creating the lottery.

Of four petitions circulating to allow casino gambling, only one, Limited Casinos, received enough approved signatures to get on the 1994 ballot. The League, again working with No Casinos, opposed this amendment and voters soundly defeated it.

Impacts of several constitutional amendments weighed heavily on the budget process during the 2003 legislative session, making it necessary to consider new revenue sources. In this regard, legislation authorizing the use of video lottery terminals (VLTs) at licensed pari-mutual facilities was introduced. Such facilities include horse tracks, dog tracks and

jai alai frontons. Once again, the League lobbied hard against the use of gambling proceeds as a state revenue source. The League urged a more reasoned approach by eliminating inappropriate exemptions from the state sales tax, putting a freeze on new exemptions, and sunseting exemptions so that they would go through an approval process to be reinstated. In the end, the measure failed because the House was resolutely opposed to any tax increases. (See Finance and Taxation for 2003 Legislative session beginning on page 20.)

But in 2004, another initiative petition to allow the use of VLTs at licensed parimutual facilities in Broward and Dade counties was on the ballot. It passed narrowly in Broward but was defeated in Dade County. The League opposed these initiatives.

## **Taxes**

LWVFL supported a failed amendment in 1986 that would have lowered the base on which homestead exemption is applied. LWVFL produced 100,000 fliers summarizing the five amendments on the November ballot.

LWVFL strongly supported two 1988 amendments, both of which passed. One created a Taxation and Budget Reform Commission to begin work in 1990. The other allowed creation of so-called blue-belt areas providing that land producing high water recharge to Florida's aquifers may be assessed at lower rates, similar to the green-belt agricultural assessments. In 1992, the League opposed an initiative amendment, Save Our Homes, that limited local property assessment increases to 3 percent per year until property changes hands. That amendment passed.

An amendment on the 1998 ballot authorized the Legislature to permit local governments to grant an additional \$25,000 homestead tax exemption to homeowners at least 65 years old whose household income does not exceed \$20,000. Based on a longtime position that there should be no increase or extension of homestead exemption, LWVFL did not support this amendment; nevertheless, voters approved it. In 2002, an amendment was passed exempting from taxation construction of add-on living quarters for a parent or grandparent of property owners or spouses who are at least 62 years old.

In the 2003 legislative session, the League advocated for a review of sales tax exemptions. After several unsuccessful attempts to bring about tax reform through the Legislature, Attorney General Bob Milligan and Senators John McKay and Jack Latvala launched the FAIR (Floridians Against Inequities in Rates) constitutional amendment, which called for the Legislature to review every sales tax exemption or exclusion every ten years. And in order to re-enact an exemption a three-fifths or 60 percent vote from each house of the Legislature would be required. The Supreme Court determined that this amendment dealt with more than one subject. The League supported this amendment; local Leagues collected signatures. In 2005, FAIR was divided into three amendments, which the League supported.

The League opposed two 2006 constitutional amendments proposed by the Legislature: Amendment #6: Increased Homestead Exemption and Amendment #7: Permanently

disabled Veterans' Discount on Homestead Ad Valorem Tax. The League opposed these amendments because it believes that there should be no increase or extension of the homestead exemption and that no source of revenue should be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the Constitution. Both passed.

Much of the 2007 legislative session, including two special sessions, was devoted to the rise in property taxes as propelled by acceleration in property values. The League voiced two reiterative messages: (1) Hold public hearings on tax measures that impact diverse local communities (2) Allow the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission that convenes every 20 years to deal with tax reform issues.

The Legislature placed a proposed constitutional amendment on the Presidential Primary ballot in January 2008 that increased the homestead exemption from \$25,000 to \$50,000 irrespective of ability to pay and granted homeowners under the Save our Homes 3 percent cap to transfer these tax savings to another home. The League and its allies fiercely fought this amendment. Voters passed it in the interest of tax relief not tax reform.

An amendment to reduce property taxes during their deployment for Florida military personnel deployed overseas appeared on the 2010 ballot and was passed by the electorate.

During the 2011 session, two amendments addressing property tax rates were passed and will appear on the 2012 ballot.

A previous amendment passed by the electorate had given additional homestead exemptions to Florida disabled veterans aged 65 and older, but only those who were Florida citizens when they went into the military were eligible. There will be a new amendment on the 2012 ballot that will expand the homestead exemption to all Florida veterans who are homeowners, 65 or older, and became disabled as the result of a combat injury, even if they were not Florida residents when they entered the military. Also, their income may not exceed \$20,000 annually. If passed, it will take effect in January 2013.

An amendment that supported property tax breaks for non-residents was taken off the ballot in 2010. The legislature passed another that will appear on the 2012 ballot; if passed, it will take effect in January 2013.

The proposed amendment would reduce the current limitation on annual growth in the assessed value of certain non-homestead property from 10 percent to 5 percent. The January 1, 2019, constitutional sunset of the non-homestead assessment limitation is delayed until 2023. The proposed amendment would also allow the Legislature by general law to prohibit increases in the assessed value of homestead property and certain non-homestead property in any year where the market value of the property decreases. If implemented by general law, this provision would prevent what is commonly referred to as "recapture" in any year where the market value of a property decreases. Also, the amendment would allow individuals who are entitled to a homestead exemption under s. 6(a), Art. VII of the State Constitution, and have not received a homestead exemption in

the previous three calendar years to receive an additional temporary homestead exemption. The additional exemption is equal to 50 percent of the just value of the homestead property, capped at the median just value for homestead property in the county where the property is located. This exemption applies only to non-school property taxes. The exemption is reduced each year and diminishes to zero in five years or less.

Other bills that passed and were signed into law included a tax break of \$1,100 per year on average for 15,000 small businesses as a first step in the effort to cut the state's annual \$2 billion corporate tax, and a tax cut for businesses by cutting state benefits for unemployed Floridians. Instead of providing the maximum \$275 weekly benefit available for 26 weeks, the state will use a sliding scale based on the unemployment rate. Benefits will be available for no more than 23 weeks and no less than 12 weeks.

During the 2008 legislative session, a Constitutional proposal (TABOR) was presented. The League strongly opposed this measure. If the amendment passed, it would restrict revenue growth at both the state and local levels to a formula based on population change and inflation. Colorado is the only state that has implemented a similar tax system and in the two years between 2001 and 2003, its state revenues decreased by 17%. TABOR requires budget cuts in good economic times since revenues above the formula-based limit cannot be spent. These budget cuts also occur in bad economic times because of insufficient funds. State services would face budget cuts, and deterioration in services would occur. Since Colorado implemented TABOR, its K-12 funding went from 35th in the nation to 49th in the nation, and higher education funding dropped by 31%.

At the same time this proposed amendment was heard in the legislature, the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission was also supposed to vote on it. After seven hours of discussion, the controversial nature of the proposal and the confusion of the public and some commission members resulted in no vote taken. Later in the session, the commission met and voted against the proposal.

Meanwhile, in the House, the proposal passed through two councils and passed on the floor. However, it was not addressed in the Senate.

During the 2009 legislative session, the proposal was again heard in committee. The League, again, opposed the legislation and testified against it in committee. While the joint resolution did pass out of one Senate committee, it was stalled in the committee that the resolution sponsor chaired. The bill was postponed four times and not even considered during the last two meetings of the session. In the House, the bill passed out of one committee but did not progress further.

Again, in 2010, TABOR or SMARTCAPS did not make it out of committee. However, the bill sponsor would be the new State Senate President in 2011, and we knew it would once again appear. TABOR was first rejected by the 2008 Taxation and Budget Commission and failed to gain momentum in either the 2009 or 2010 sessions of the legislature.

In February 2011, TABOR was back as a Senate Joint Resolution. It was heard in four committee meetings prior to the start of the legislative session and would be heard in the full

Senate in the first week of session. Opponents argued that a revenue cap already exists in the state constitution, and it has never been reached; one senator expressed concern about Florida's bond rating if the resolution is passed. An attempt to exempt bonds from the revenue cap failed.

Since TABOR was a high priority for the Senate President, many Senators felt obligated to support the resolution. After passage by the required 3/5 vote, the resolution was sent to the House.

The bill was next heard in the House Finance and Tax committee. The League worked to organize a presentation before the committee, including testimony from a representative of the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute who described the impact of TABOR on Colorado's government services, infrastructure and economy since its passage in 1992. Colorado went from being a middle of the pack state in funding for services and infrastructure to dead last and also had a more difficult time recovering from the recession. There were others who testified, including the president of the Florida League. The bill passed the committee on a party-line vote; since it was identical to the Senate version, it could come up before the full House for final passage early in the session. By the end of the sixth week of session, the bill had been heard in the House Appropriations Committee where the League again spoke against it. The bill went to the House floor in the last week of session and passed with the required 3/5 vote and will appear on the 2012 ballot. In order to reduce opposition to the resolution among legislators, the revenue caps will apply only at the state level; cities and counties are not included in the cap. However, it is hard to imagine that limiting revenues at the state level will not affect local governments.

If passed by the voters, the law will take effect in the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

## **Executive**

A 1998 amendment to the Florida Constitution:

- Merged the Cabinet offices of treasurer and comptroller into one chief financial officer.
- Effective 2002, reduced membership of the Cabinet to chief financial officer, attorney general, and agriculture commissioner. Secretary of state and commissioner of education are no longer elected cabinet offices.
- Created an appointed state board of education, which appoints the commissioner of education. A number of bills were filed in the 1999 Legislature to implement this amendment, but none passed. The 2000 Legislature abolished the Board of Regents and established the Florida Board of Education, whose seven members are appointed by the governor with confirmation by the Senate. An initiative amendment was passed in 2002 setting up another layer of educational governance.

Another 1998 amendment, which also passed, allows candidates for governor to run in the primary without a candidate for lieutenant governor.

# **LWVFL Constitution Positions**

## **ARTICLE III: Legislature**

The Florida Legislature should have:

1. One vote for each legislator.
2. Annual sessions.
3. Partisan elections.
4. No fixed legislative salaries.
5. Representation based on whole population as defined by federal census.
6. A self-executing reapportionment formula effected by an agency independent of the Legislature with automatic Supreme Court review every ten years (after decennial census).
7. Single-member districts. (1981)
8. Mandatory merit or civil service system for state personnel.
9. Two-year terms for representatives and four-year terms for senators.
10. Small and workable houses with their size specified in the Constitution.

### **Rules should include:**

1. Simplified procedures for the passage of bills.
2. Adequate notice of time and agenda of committee meetings. (1970; revised 1977)

## **ARTICLE IV: Executive**

1. The governor should be permitted to succeed himself for one term.
2. There should be a lieutenant governor, running on the same ticket as the governor.
3. There should be a Cabinet appointed by the governor with legislative consent.
4. Cabinet duties and/or posts should be defined in the Constitution only in broad, general terms.
5. If election of any member of the Cabinet is retained:
  - a. Terms should be limited in the same manner as the governors.
  - b. Provision should be made for the governor to have some authority over the cabinet. (1967)

## **ARTICLE V: Judicial**

1. There should be uniformity in courts throughout the state. (1942)
2. There should be simplification and consolidation in courts to eliminate duplication. (1952)
3. There should be provision for the governor to appoint judges from a group of nominees selected by a panel or commission composed of members of the Bar and lay members. (1967) Judges should be retained in office by means of periodic review through an election in which a judge runs unopposed and solely on his or her record. (1976)

## **ARTICLE VII: Finance and Taxation**

No tax sources or revenue should be specified, limited, exempted, or prohibited in the Constitution. (1967; revised 1977)

## **ARTICLE VIII: Local Government**

All charters for local governmental units should provide for initiative and referendum.

1. Constitutional provisions for local government should be a limitation of powers. Local government should have all powers not expressly prohibited by the Constitution or by general law. (1967)
2. The Constitution should require the Legislature to create statutory provisions for local governments to adopt charters. These provisions should be self-executing in that they should require no further legislative action or approval. (1967)
3. The Legislature should be required to create statutory provisions for a general form of local government with ordinance-making powers for those local governments not wishing to adopt charters. (1967)
4. The Constitution should not specify local government officials. (1967)
5. The Constitution should place some limitation on special acts. (1967)

## **ARTICLE X: Miscellaneous**

1. There should be no state lottery. (1982)
2. There should be no casino gambling. However, in the event that casino gambling was legalized:
  - a. Casino gambling should be regulated by the state.
  - b. Casino gambling should be permitted only by local option. (1982)



## **ARTICLE XI: Amendments**

1. Constitutional provisions for amendment and revision should include convention and initiative. (1967)
2. Revision or amendment by any method should be subject to a vote of the electorate. (1967)
3. Florida should have both constitutional and statutory initiatives. (1996)
4. Criteria should be developed to determine whether an initiative is appropriately placed in the Constitution or in statutory law. (1996)
5. A supermajority of those voting on an initiative should be required to pass a constitutional amendment. (1996)
6. There should be a requirement that a span of years elapse before a defeated or voter approved constitutional initiative amendment is placed on the ballot again. (Amended 2005)
7. The ballot language of an initiative amendment should be reviewed and/or revised by a designated group.
8. The state should be required to inform voters on the pros and cons and potential impact of each petition initiative on the ballot.
9. The number of signatures for placing a citizen initiative on the ballot should be greater for a constitutional than for a statutory initiative.
10. Sponsors should not be permitted to pay signature gatherers on a per signature basis.
11. Sponsors who pay signature gatherers should not be allowed to claim "undue burden" resulting in waiver of the signature verification fee.
12. There should be regulations governing signature gatherers that require that signature gatherers:
  13. Be registered voters in Florida.
  14. Register their name, address and telephone number.
  15. Sign a statement that citizens signing a petition did so in the gatherer's presence.
  16. Not be required to pay a registration fee.
17. Businesses/industries should be allowed to make financial contributions to petition initiative committees.
18. There should be limitations on the amount of financial contributions made to citizen petition initiative committees by persons, businesses/industries and political action committees or any one of these. (Items #7-14: 1996)

## Criteria for Evaluating Government

Whatever the issue, the League of Women Voters of Florida believed that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibilities, adequate financing, coordination among levels of government, effective enforcement and well-defined channels for citizen input and review.

### *Finance and Taxation*

Support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.

Florida League members have long shown concern for taxation as a means of securing adequate revenue for services that the League supports. As a part of the first state program, finance was studied in relation to the Florida school system.

#### **1950s**

In 1958 League members began a study of the entire state tax system: sources of revenue, major expenditures, major state taxes, fiscal procedures, local finances and intergovernmental relations, assessment practices, and canons of good taxation related to Florida's tax structure. LWVFL published a praised "Our Financial State: The Tax Structure of Florida" in 1959. This booklet was the result of the tax study made that year by the League of Women Voters of Gainesville.

During the state study, members noted many existing inequities and poor practices, and in 1960 they voted to pursue means of eliminating some tax inequities and equalizing property assessments.

#### **1960s**

As part of its 1966-67 study of Constitution Revision the League concluded that there was no single constitutional article containing more unnecessary statutory material than the article on finance and taxation. The study determined that the flexibility needed to make the tax structure responsive to the needs of the people could only be obtained if specific provisions of tax sources and revenues are left up to the Legislature or appropriate governmental bodies, not specified in the Constitution itself. During a 1967-1968 study, members agreed that heavy reliance on the sales tax did not produce sufficient revenue and that further increases would result in compounding

the already-existing tax inequities. Local revenues from property taxes were not sufficient to provide necessary services, but they could not be increased while current exemptions were continued without creating further inequities. The source that would both be equitable and produce sufficient revenue was a personal income tax. When the League supported and worked for the adoption of the new Constitution in 1968 it did so with great concern about the tax article. League members believed that the only improvement regarding taxes was that at least all tax-related provisions were included in a single Article VII.

League deplored the 10-mil limitation on local taxing bodies in the 1968 Constitution and was even more concerned about the 8-mil ceiling subsequently imposed on local school operating millage. Increased homestead exemptions for the disabled and for those over 65 regardless of ability to pay also found disfavor with League members.

### **1970s**

League members' hope that Article VII could the concept has not found favor in the Florida Legislature. The LWVFL Board in 1975 recommended to the governor, Cabinet and Legislature the establishment of a statewide Tax Reform Commission. The League wanted the Commission to do a factual analysis of Florida's tax structure, its ability to meet growing needs, its dependability, its equitability, and fairness. The League's tax-related proposals made to the 1977-78 Constitutional Revision Commission were not accepted and, in turn, the Commission's proposals were rejected at the polls.

Sensitive to the tax revolt begun in California with the passage of Proposition 13, the governor and Legislature wrangled over what to do about an unexpected surplus in the state treasury. Improved assessment practices and inflated property values had greatly increased property tax yields.

The League was unsuccessful in getting the Legislature to increase funding for people needs. Meanwhile a Tax Reform Commission including a former LWVFL Tax chair, was appointed by the governor. The Commission's recommendations were a disappointment to the League.

### **1980s**

The Legislature proposed utilizing the surplus funds for property tax relief by placing a constitutional amendment on the March 1980 presidential preference ballot that would give property tax relief on school taxes by increasing the homestead exemption for five-year residents of the state. The League strongly opposed this amendment, and, although it passed, it was later declared unconstitutional. In November 1980 voters approved a constitutional amendment increasing the homestead exemption to \$25,000 for city and county property taxes.

All LWVFL tax positions were reviewed during 1979-1980. However, when educational and other groups urged League support of a one-cent increase in the sales tax there was no position for such action. An action motion for such support was defeated at the 1981

LWVFL Convention, but further tax study, including sales and gasoline taxes, gambling, impact fees and documentary fees, was adopted.

In 1982 the League took a strong position against casino gambling and a state lottery as revenue sources. Initiative petitions in favor of both were circulated prior to the 1982 election. Neither acquired enough signatures to qualify for the ballot.

Problems of financing local governments had been exacerbated by the increased homestead exemption. Rapid-growth areas of the state were unable to keep up with the demand for additional capital improvements required to service new residents. Slower-growth areas found their tax rolls reduced to the point that it was difficult for them to provide services and maintain existing facilities. The League reached a position in favor of enabling legislation to authorize additional sources of revenue to provide for these needs. Impact fees and a real estate transfer tax were considered as two possibilities. Members agreed there should be a provision for local option and an earmarking of revenue only for those projects consistent with local comprehensive plans.

In 1984 the League took an active part in the campaign against the Citizens Choice Amendment, which would have limited how governments, including local, can tax. The amendment was ultimately removed from the ballot by the Supreme Court as dealing with more than one subject. League lobbying efforts during the 1985, 1986 and 1987 legislative sessions focused on increasing the tax base, both state and local, and providing revenues to finance infrastructure needs.

At the local taxing level, the League supported equitable property tax reform, which would have put more properties back on the tax rolls by changing the \$25,000 homestead exemption formula to a three-level graduated tax: no tax on the first \$5,000 valuation, tax at half valuation from \$5,000 to \$45,000, and tax at full value any amount over \$45,000. In November 1986, voters turned down a constitutional amendment to that effect.

In 1985, League was the only group lobbying to sunset more than 200 existing sales tax exemptions in order to broaden the tax base. During the 1986 session, the Legislature, actively searching for new revenue sources for infrastructure and other needs, made the decision to eliminate several exemptions immediately and to sunset the remaining exemptions for review in 1987 after a Sales Tax Exemptions Study Committee reported its findings.

By the 1987 session, other organizations and pressure groups (including the State Comprehensive Plan Commission) had joined with the League in advocating a sales tax on most services. Despite opposition from many special interest service lobby groups, a fairly broad-based sales tax was placed on the service industry. The new tax on services was immediately challenged by attorneys and the advertising industry in the form of lawsuits and an advertising boycott of Florida by certain advertisers as well as a petition drive to repeal.

The Legislature repealed the tax on services on January 1, 1988 and raised the sales tax one cent to a total of six cents beginning February 1 of that year.

With the increased sales tax revenues, a State Infrastructure Trust Fund was created consisting of 2 percent of sales tax revenues (maximum of \$200 million) the first year and 5 percent (maximum of \$500 million) the following years. In addition, the League supported the 1987 legislation giving counties the option of levying a sales tax of up to 1 percent to finance infrastructure, subject to local referendum.

Two gambling-related amendments — a state lottery and a local-option casino gambling proposal — were placed on the November 1986 ballot via the petition signature method. The League campaigned actively against both amendments. Casino gambling was soundly defeated but the lottery amendment passed decisively. The 1987 Legislature was then charged with creating a state lottery. The League continued to monitor the item, posing questions to the appropriate legislative committees on lottery methodology and supporting accountability of the governor in appointments of the Lottery Commission and the director of the lottery. The lottery began in January 1988. During the 1989 session the League monitored spending of lottery funds, which had been promised by lottery proponents to aid education but were, in fact, substituting for monies already allocated to education. A League-supported bill requiring lottery proceeds be used for education enhancement and guaranteeing a minimum annual level of funds, failed to pass.

In 1989, as Florida faced growing revenue problems, LWVFL began a two-year study of Florida's tax structure. As a result of this study, new positions were adopted including reinstatement of support for a state personal income tax, which had been dropped during the 1979-1980 study.

## **1990s**

LWVFL monitored the proceedings of the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, which made its final report to the Legislature in 1992. League members around the state testified before the Commission. The 1991 Legislature put some Commission recommendations into place by rule. The League was disappointed in the final report of the Commission because there were no significant recommendations for tax reform. The Commission did place two constitutional amendments that the League supported on the 1992 general election ballot: budget reform and taxation of government leaseholds.

The latter was removed from the ballot by the Court. The budget reform amendment passed and included League-supported provisions for opening the state budget process to all legislators and the public; integrating the state comprehensive plan and agency functional plans into the budget process; giving local government more options for generating revenues; and accounting for all state funds within a single accounting system. That same year the League opposed a citizen-initiated homestead valuation limitation. This amendment passed and was implemented July 1, 1995.

Both the 1992 and 1993 legislative sessions were characterized by conflict among the governor, the House and the Senate over budget and taxes. In 1992 League joined with

other statewide organizations to back the Governor's Fair Share plan, which combined a property-tax rollback, reduction in sales tax, broadening the sales tax base, and significant funding for needed services. This plan was not accepted by the Legislature. In 1993 the governor proposed including Subchapter S corporations in business taxes as well as expanding the state sales tax on goods to include some services. These proposals were defeated with only a few minor League-favored pieces of tax legislation. surviving, e.g. a law deleting the 15-year limit on the imposition of a discretionary sales surtax levied by counties.

In 1994 several former members of the first Taxation and Budget Reform Commission registered to circulate petitions to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot to limit state revenue collections in order to "encourage" the Legislature to pass a joint resolution on the subject. The Commission could never get the votes while in session to place this on the ballot. The ploy worked and the Legislature placed the Limitation on State Revenue Collections on the ballot. The League worked in opposition to this amendment, but it was passed by the voters.

In 1996 yet another restriction on taxation/fees was added to the Constitution by 69 percent of the voters. An initiative petition requiring two-thirds favorable vote of the citizens to add new taxes or fees to the Constitution passed in spite of League opposition. The voters seem not to subscribe to the Canons of Sound Taxation adopted so long ago by League members.

A study released in 1996 by the Citizens for Tax Justice rated Florida as having one of the ten most regressive systems because taxes disproportionately hit the poorest families. Canon, one bites the dust. Canon two, adequacy of revenue, is lost to our crowded classrooms and other unfulfilled needs.

In preparation for the 1998 elections, LWVFL testified in vain before the Constitution Revision Commission for a clean tax article. An amendment passed that authorizes the Legislature to grant an additional \$25,000 homestead exemption to homeowners at least 65 years old, whose household income does not exceed \$20,000.

## **2000s**

Knowing that Florida was facing extreme budgetary challenges, LWVFL made fiscal policy a primary legislative priority during the 2003 legislative session. Funding constraints were expected to be at an all-time high due to a downturn in economic growth and other significant items:

- Article V: Beginning July 2004, the state would be required to pay for judicial services previously funded at the local level. Costs were estimated between \$400 and \$600 million.
- Class Size: Fiscal impact for the recently passed class size constitutional amendment would be considerable. The highest estimate was at \$3 billion in the next year.

- Health Care: The costs of Medicare and Medicaid were rapidly increasing and translated into a further budgetary toll.
- Bullet Train: This constitutional amendment provided for a high-speed rail system in Florida.
- Death Tax: The federal government's elimination of the estate tax meant lost revenues to individual states.
- The 2002 Legislature funded roughly \$1-billion worth of recurring state programs out of non-recurring revenues.

The League tackled the issues from several fronts. First, a 10-point platform of policy reforms was crafted. It called for eliminating appropriate sales tax exemptions and creating a freeze on establishment of new exemptions; capturing taxes due to remote sales such as "e-commerce"; equipping local governments with revenue tools to address community based needs; and establishing a mechanism for fiscal policy reviews and reforms in the year ahead. The League also conducted its own detailed review of current tax exemptions and offered a plan for eliminating more than \$1 billion.

To generate further attention on the issues and pressure lawmakers, the League organized a press conference and a joint position statement with a range of other groups. The League lobbied hard for its positions and provided information to other groups interested in the issues. A broader based media outreach was also undertaken involving press interviews, opinion editorials and other steps.

The Florida Legislature's 2003 session accomplished little on major issues. The budget was passed in special session after the House and Senate had refused to compromise when their goals were millions of dollars apart. While the Senate acknowledged the need for new revenue streams, the House was resolutely opposed to any tax increases. Even the prospect of collecting revenue through Internet sales was not supported by the House in order for enabling legislation to be addressed. The final result was a budget with numerous state needs and programs not funded or underfunded.

In the 2004 session the League expanded its platform of fiscal policy reforms and emphasized the need for long-range revenue planning, supporting excellent legislation advanced by the Senate. However, staunch opposition from the House Speaker stopped any meaningful laws from being passed. But the League had laid the groundwork for the 2005 session. It endeavored to work with the new leadership in the House and Senate to advance the fiscal improvements that the League supported.

Several League priority issues did pass in the 2005 session: One was long-range planning and budgeting legislation that started in 2004. The League's one concern with this approach is the placement of a limitation of expenditure of nonrecurring general revenue in the state Constitution. The long-range planning and projections on budget needs was strongly supported. Also passed was a streamlined sales and use tax. Some of the bills that died that the League opposed were the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, the elimination of surcharges on the sale of alcoholic beverages for consumption on premises and all the

sports subsidy bills (the Senate refused to take them to the floor). The House refused to give the bills a hearing. The League was the only organization publicly objecting to the passage of these bills. Also, during the 2005 session, both the House and Senate introduced bills to create the Sales and Use Tax Exemption Committee for the purpose of reviewing exemptions from general state sales and use tax. But the bills died in committee.

As part of the Growth Management legislative priority for the 2006 session, the League successfully pushed legislation that enabled counties to add a surcharge of up to \$2 on rental or lease of motor vehicles through citizen referendum to underwrite local transportation improvements. Unfortunately, the governor vetoed this bill.

Fiscal policy was added to the 2007 legislative priorities at Legislative Seminar when local League leaders overwhelmingly pressed for League lobbyist action in the heated property tax arena. League members gave generously to fund this extra work. Our message was clear: Let the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission convened in early 2007 do its job.

The Legislature did not listen. It called a special session in June and passed legislation that would impose a "rolled-back" real property tax rate on counties, cities and special property districts for the fiscal year 2007-08, and imposes maximum increases in tax rates and in total tax revenues that counties, cities and special property districts can collect in following years, on penalty of forfeiting the sales tax revenues that are owed to them. It also crafted a proposed constitutional amendment for the 2008 presidential preference primary ballot that would (1) Enact a new homestead exemption in the amount of 75 percent of the first \$200,000 of the homestead value, plus 15 percent of the next \$300,000; provide for annual increases in the upper limit based on growth in per capita Florida personal income; provide a minimum exemption of \$50,000, or \$100,000 for low-income seniors. (2) Allow homesteaders now subject to the Save our Homes tax limitation as of Jan. 1, 2008, to keep the existing exemption or irrevocably choose the new exemption. Homesteads established after enactment may not elect SOH. The League opposed this ballot question.

Then the Leon County Circuit Court found the ballot language misleading and ordered that it should not be placed on the presidential preference primary ballot. Rather than rewrite the ballot language, the Florida Legislature held an additional Special Legislative Session in October 2007, to craft new property tax constitutional provisions. Voters passed this amendment. The League opposed it. League members again gave generously at Convention and thereafter to support the lobbyist for six months beyond the regular session.

The League viewed the convening of the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission (TBRC) as an opportunity to achieve real tax reform for Florida based upon public input. Local Leagues gave testimony at seven statewide public hearings in fall 2007. The League spoke for an equitable tax system based upon ability to pay, which suggests a state income tax; called for a systematic review of sales tax exemptions and an open process for economically justified e-enactment; and suggested a closing of several corporate tax loopholes. The TBRC that meets every 20 years per the Florida Constitution has the authority to propose constitutional amendments. Their recommendations were due by May 2008.



In the 2008 session, a house joint resolution was introduced that would amend the Save-Our-Homes amendment and provide a greater homestead exemption. The bill did not survive the session and was never agented in the Senate. A bill aimed at closing an existing tax loophole in the system that allows companies in Florida to assign business profit gained in Florida to other states in order to avoid Florida taxation was introduced in the house. The League supported this bill. However, the position of the leadership in the House was that there would be no more revenue collected, and the bill was laid on the table.

During the 2009 session, everyone on the Senate & House Finance & Tax Councils was asked to review all current sales tax exemptions. For the first time in decades the Senate Finance and Tax Committee heard a presentation that identified over \$2 million in exemptions that could be eliminated. While the committee expressed a willingness to consider ending some tax exemptions, very few members recommended eliminating any of the exemptions they reviewed, and none of those recommendations were adopted by either Council. Instead the House and Senate agreed to raise fees on services such as driver's licenses, title transfers, court fees, university tuition, and fishing licenses. Some of the fees were more than doubled.

A bill introduced in the House called for all reviewable tax exemptions to be considered for repeal or modification by the Joint Legislative Sunset Committee and for all reviewable exemptions to expire if not renewed or modified. A companion bill was filed in the senate. The House bill was never place on the agenda of the Finance & Tax Committee, and the Senate bill never made it out of its first committee.

A Senate bill that increased the cigarette tax by one dollar and levied the tax on all tobacco products except for cigars did become law.

In a repeat of the 2008 session, a bill was introduced in the Senate that would close an existing tax loophole in Florida's system that allows companies in Florida to assign business profit gained in Florida to other states, thereby avoiding Florida taxation. The League supported this legislation and spoke in support of it. The bill passed successfully through three committees before dying in the Policy and Steering Committee on Ways and Means; a House companion bill was never heard in committee.

Still another Senate bill was introduced that would close other corporate tax loopholes dealing with deductibility of intangible expense, interest expenses, and management fees. This bill also died in committee.

In both sessions the TABOR constitutional amendment was introduced. The League strongly opposed the amendment that would require budget cuts in both good and poor economic times because revenues above a formula-based limit could not be spent. It would mean that state services would constantly face budget cuts and deteriorate in most years. During the 2008 session, the proposal was voted down in the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission. While it passed the House, it died in the Senate. Unfortunately, it arose again during the 2009 session. While it passed through one committee in the Senate, it was postponed four times in a second committee where it finally died. In the House it also died in committee.

As previously noted in the Government in Florida, while the TABOR bill went nowhere in 2010, it was passed by both Houses as joint resolution and will appear on the 2012 ballot.

The League of Women Voters of Florida believes local governments should have available a variety of options for generating revenues to meet local needs. Florida's revenue structure is inadequate to meet the needs of Floridians. The Legislature already substantially cut the public education budget and many other services that are essential to our state's long-term prosperity.

The federal stimulus monies awarded to Florida have postponed but not solved some of the financial problems facing the state, including those in education funding.

During the 2012 session, legislation passed that doubled the corporate income tax exemption to \$50,000.

Legislators also passed three proposed constitutional amendments that would appear on the 2012 ballot; one that doubled the size of the tax exemption on business property and allowed local governments to increase the exemption as they saw fit. A second amendment would allow counties and cities to reduce property taxes for low-income seniors, and a third would eliminate property taxes for spouses of veterans or first responders killed in the line of duty. These proposed amendments joined three that had already been proposed for the ballot; one amendment that extended extra property tax exemptions to all disabled veterans living in Florida eliminated the previously passed amendment requirement that the veteran would have to have entered the military while living in Florida. Another would extend homestead property exemptions to non-homestead property, and, finally, TABOR was on the ballot.

The League of Women Voters of Florida believes that no tax sources or revenues should be specified, limited, exempted, or prohibited in the Constitution; the League opposed all six of these amendments. The three dealing with disabled veterans, surviving spouses, and low-income seniors did pass with 60% of the vote; the other three were soundly defeated by the electorate.

The League had been opposed to TABOR from the outset and was successful in its work to defeat it.

At the 2021 LWVFL Convention Delegates opted to support state funding of vote-by-mail ballots in all counties when congressional and state legislative offices are on a ballot.

Tax positions follow.

## **LWVFL Constitution Positions Regarding Tax Policy**

### **A Clean Tax Article in the Florida Constitution**

No tax sources or revenues should be specified, limited, exempted, or prohibited in the Constitution. (1967; revised 1977)

### **Comprehensive plan**

1. The LWVFL believes that the state of Florida has an infrastructure deficit and that state service levels, and the quality of life are declining. Because the long-term goals of the state comprehensive plan were designed to reverse decline in levels of service and improve the quality of life, members find these goals are generally

desirable and worth working toward. (1990)

2. Therefore, sufficient state taxes should be levied to begin the process of achieving these goals. (1990)

### **Tax structure**

1. Members believe that Florida's tax structure should be reformed in order that a greater proportion of taxes would be levied on the basis of ability to pay. (1990)
2. Local governments in Florida should be authorized through enabling legislation to utilize additional sources of revenue to finance capital improvements and major maintenance projects. (1983)
3. Local governments in Florida should have available a variety of options for generating revenues to meet local needs. (1991)
4. Formulas for state revenue sharing should take into consideration population, revenue bases and other economic conditions. (1991)

### **Accountability**

The LWVFL believes that a system should be devised to measure effectiveness of expenditure of tax dollars in order to provide fiscal accountability and responsibility. (1991)

### **Property tax**

1. There should be no increase or extension of homestead exemption. (1968, 1979)
2. Goals for attaining equity in property appraisal:
  - a. Professional-level appraisals that more nearly approach fair market value in all areas of the state.
  - b. Enforcement of statewide uniformity in appraisal practices.
  - c. Combined city-county appraisals.
  - d. No property tax on those kinds of personal property that cannot be appraised equitably.
  - e. A broader real property base. Re-evaluation should be made of exemptions granted to charitable, religious, educational, fraternal and civic properties to determine which serve a public purpose. Exemptions on properties owned by such groups should be limited to the extent that such subsidies are justified. (1968, 1979)
  - f. Mobile homes considered as real property for tax purposes. (1974, 1979)
  - g. Preferential assessment for agricultural land with tax recovery when land is reclassified. (1974, 1979)
  - h. Public service charges for tax-exempt institutions. (1962, 1979)
3. Tax-relief (circuit breakers) for low income persons — both property owners and

renters of all ages. (1974, 1979)

### **Sales tax**

1. There should be no sales tax on groceries or medicine. (1962, 1980)
2. The rebate on sales tax should be no more than sufficient to cover the costs of collection. (1980)
3. There should be a beverage tax based on value rather than on quantity. (1977, 1980)
4. Ways should be found to make the general sales tax less regressive. (1977, 1980)
5. Any increase in motor fuel taxes should be utilized for transportation including mass transit. (1977, 1980)
6. The LWVFL should support an increase in the sales tax when necessary to provide adequate revenue at the state level. (1982)

### **Corporate income tax**

There should be a tax on corporate income with uniform rates for all types of corporations. (1968, 1971, 1980)

### **Personal income tax**

The LWVFL supports the adoption of a state personal income tax as one part of a balanced and equitable tax structure. (1991)

### **Severance tax**

1. There should be a tax on the severance of non-renewable natural resources. (1968, 1980)
2. Tax incentives should be provided for conservation and restoration connected with severing the resources. (1962, 1980)
3. There should be an increase in the solid mineral severance tax. (1977, 1980)

### **Collection agency**

There should be a single, separate agency for the collection of all non-regulatory state taxes. (1962, 1980)

## *Election Law*

Support laws and policies to protect, extend and encourage voting rights. Advocate for fair methods of financing political campaigns including public financing.

The League of Women Voters grew out of the suffragist movement and was organized to teach women to register and to vote. Educating the electorate and protecting democracy have been the continuing cornerstones of League activity. The League believes that an informed electorate is essential to the promotion of a representative, accountable, responsive and open government.

During the 2008 session, the League supported a bill calling for tougher post-election audit requirements as well as a bill that would allow voters registered in the state of Florida as "no party affiliation" to vote in the presidential primary. Neither bill made it to the floor. The Secretary of State introduced a bill that addressed a tightening up of various election systems; there were many points with which the League did not agree. Our lobbyist addressed some of these concerns in a committee meeting and the chair of the committee asked that the Secretary reach out to groups like the League that had problems with the bill. League and Common Cause representatives met with the Secretary and his staff and laid out our concerns; they included when to invalidate a petition, insuring that the process for removal of "deceased" voter names from the rolls is accurate, and when bundling of petitions is permissible. The Court had already stated that the Secretary did not have the statutory authority to pass a rule prohibiting bundling; at this time, the Secretary was appealing the decision. This is another reason why the League did not feel that the time was appropriate for the Secretary to deal with this issue.

Specifically, the League believes that bundling of like petitions should be permissible as long as there is a requirement that the voter still affirmatively act on each petition. After much jockeying, the final bill left much of the current law unchanged; while the current law had problems, they were not as broad as those in the new bill. We worked with one of the Senators on the procedure for revocation of signatures on petitions, and that amendment was added to the bill. However, on the day the bill was heard, the 1st District Court of Appeals struck down the revocation law, and support for the amendment dwindled; the amendment was withdrawn. In the latter part of March, U.S. Senator Bill Nelson addressed the Florida Senate and declared the Florida election system "broken" and called for election reform.

In February 2009, the Secretary of State reported to the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee. He attributed the success of the 2008 elections in Florida directly to early voting. 2.6 million voted early, 2.5 million voted absentee, and 4.1 million voted on election day. [adds up to 9.2 million]. While, statewide, this was not higher than the record 1992

election turnout, he concluded that there would have been many more glitches and longer waits on Election Day, if early voting had not been in place. During the early voting period, the Governor extended the hours for early voting. The League supports early voting and the Supervisors of Elections who have asked for more flexibility in determining early voting sites. The sites used were determined by the legislature; many were in libraries, and, according to the Secretary, literally closed down library activities.

Several legislators filed bills during the 2009 session that concerned early voting. Most common among the issues addressed were extending hours, adding more locations to the acceptable locations list, providing supervisors of elections with more flexibility to choose locations and times, and establishing a board to review early voting. Despite overwhelming support from groups like the League, the Supervisors of Elections Association, the Secretary of State, and the Governor, none of these bills was heard in any committee.

The Secretary of State presented three issues that he would have liked the legislature to consider: greater flexibility for supervisors of elections in determining early voting sites, an increase in the number of precincts and races audited, and an update of the statutes regarding electronic transmission to overseas voters, including e-mails. None of these issues was addressed during the session.

Meanwhile, the Ethics and Election Committee had not presented an election reform package. After several attempts to address bill language, a committee substitute bill was released by the committee in mid-April. The new bill severely restricted third party voter registration efforts, removed previously acceptable forms of ID, required all who registered by mail to go to the Supervisor of Elections office and show proper ID or be forced to vote a provisional ballot, required anyone who has a change of address within 28 days of an election to vote a provisional ballot, and gutted the citizen initiative process, allowing just two years for a petition to be valid. The bill also created a moving 100 foot "no solicitation zone" around polling places and barred media access to polling places. Campaign finance rules were weakened; prohibitions on leadership funds were removed and political committees registered in other states would not have to file Florida spending disclosure reports. During committee hearings, the League lobbyist testified to the constitutional issues in the bill. Other groups coordinated their efforts so that all problematic parts of the bill would be addressed. However, after five citizens testified, testimony was restricted to three minutes per person. The bill was passed out of committee. Meanwhile a companion bill was introduced in the House that same day and was to be heard early the next morning. House committee members received the bill late in the afternoon but were in session until late evening. Most members had fewer than twelve hours to review the bill. The League offered to meet with any members who needed some explanation and discussion; three members did meet with the League lobbyist. The next morning, the League and other like-minded groups arrived at the meeting ready to testify. The first twenty-five minutes were used by one of the legislators

to explain the bill and answer a few questions. One of the representatives called for the question as the committee was preparing to hear public testimony. The chair allowed one speaker to address the committee for one minute and a representative from a public interest organization spoke for thirty seconds before it was pointed out that the question had been called and public testimony would not be heard. The other speakers were told to submit written comments after the committee voted on the bill. The committee debated for six minutes and passed the bill on to the House floor.

Several differences in the House bill included a "resign to run" provision, a prohibition on the Governor extending early voting hours unless a state of emergency is called, no change in early voting sites allowed, and an exclusion of any advice to voters within the 100 feet "no solicitation zone. It also delayed voting machine compliance for the disabled voters under HAVA until 2014. Later in the week, elements of an onerous bill to restrict petition gathering activities were incorporated into the massive elections bill. While the League was one of the organizations taking the lead on opposing the legislation, there were forty other groups represented and working to defeat the bill. A press conference was held, and many legislators spoke in opposition to the bill, organizations alerted their members and many phone calls were made to legislators asking them to vote against the bill. Efforts were made in the Senate to assure the bill would be sent directly to the floor. In the House, the bill was temporarily postponed allowing negotiations to remove problematic parts; however, time expired and the bill was not brought up again. On the last day of the session, both bills were indefinitely postponed and withdrawn from consideration in the extended session to be held the following week.

While the 2010 legislative session did not address election law, including more flexibility for supervisors in determining early voting sites, the 2011 session produced a bill that was labeled "the voter suppression act" by many groups that register voters. According to the Secretary of State, the bill did not originate in his department; usually, the Secretary of State gives an update to the Senate Ethics and Election Committee early in the session and also presents the "wants" and needs of the department. Instead, on April 1, a bill was introduced that would cut the number of early voting days, require voters who change their address to vote a provisional ballot if the change was across county lines, require voter registration groups to register with the state and submit completed forms within 48 hours instead of 10 days; the bill also reduced the number of years for citizen initiative petitions to be valid from four years to two. Early voting would start 10 days before an election and end on the third day prior to the election, the total number of hours not to exceed ninety-six; supervisors would have the discretion of making early voting available from 48 to 96 hours during the eight days. There was no provision made to allow for flexibility in choosing early voting sites. To add to the confusion, there were countless strike-all amendments; every time, the bill was to be heard in another committee, it was almost completely rewritten. During the sixth week of the session, the bill was heard in committees in the House and the Senate; each time "strike-all" amendments of over 100 pages were added to the bill. In other words, the bill

was completely rewritten. These amendments were not made available until the night before the committee meeting was to be held. During the eighth week of session, the bill was heard in the Senate Budget committee on Monday and Tuesday. League members and other opponents of the bill attended both meetings and filed over thirty appearance cards to speak or waive in opposition to the bill. Finally, on Tuesday, the bill was brought up with only thirty minutes remaining in the meeting. After discussion by the committee, just three minutes were left for public comment, and only one person was allowed to speak before the bill was passed by the committee.

In response to this abuse of the legislative process and to put the Senate on notice concerning the lack of public testimony and legislative debate, the League hosted a well-attended press conference later in the week. Members of like-minded groups, as well as the Leon County Supervisor of Elections attended and addressed the press corps.

Needless to say, those groups who advocate for voting rights as well as Supervisors of Elections were not pleased with the legislation. The League worked to defeat this legislation; we participated in press events and provided both House and Senate members with talking points and questions for debate. There was a spirited debate in the House, and the sponsor of the bill was not able to give an adequate response to many of the questions asked. In the Senate, one Senator stated that “we should make it harder to vote.” Both chambers passed the bill in what can best be described as party line votes.

The State Division of Elections presented the rules for the bill, the Governor signed the bill, and it went into effect immediately. However, since five counties (Collier, Hardee, Hendry, Hillsborough, Monroe) in Florida had previously been found to practice racial discrimination in voting practices, the bill had to go to the Department of Justice for preclearance.

The League and several other organizations requested that the Department of Justice reject this bill because it will infringe on the rights of minority voters. On July 29, 2011, the Secretary of State withdrew, from the state’s request for preclearance, the four most controversial parts of the bill—early voting, third party voter registration, change of address across county lines, and the citizen initiative changes. Instead, the Secretary wanted the decision to be made by a federal court. Since the state had not asked for an expedited pre-clearance, and the DOJ had to make a decision by the end of the first week in August, the motivation for the withdrawal of these four sections was unclear.

### **Voting rights**

League involvement in the 1972 elections provided the impetus for the adoption of a study item at the 1973 LWVFL convention. A diminishing voter turnout, despite Voters Service efforts, moved the League to do an in-depth study of election laws and procedures. The 38 positions adopted in January 1974 are summarized as follows:



"The League of Women Voters of Florida believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens. Fundamental to this participation is the citizens' right to vote. In order to increase participation, the League believes that elections officials have the responsibility for encouraging the exercise of the vote, for promoting citizen confidence in and understanding of the electoral process, and for providing equal access to the ballot." (Complete wording of Election Law positions begins on page 34.)

At its 1975 Convention, League delegates reaffirmed the above position and mandated further action. In 1977 the Convention adopted a new study on primary elections and campaign finance laws, but the State Board deferred action due to time constraints and recognition that LWVUS positions on campaign finance were adaptable to state issues. The 1977 Legislature revised the election code to include closing registration books 30 days before elections, a simplified procedure for absentee voting, consolidation of election functions in the supervisor's office and reinstatement of purged voters at the polls.

The 1983 Convention voted to review existing positions for concurrence in 1983-84 and to study the primary system, campaign finance, election reporting, mail balloting and electronic voting techniques in 1984-85. As in 1977, the LWVF Board decided not to take on the study of campaign finance because they believed the subject was too complex to be properly addressed with the other issues.

In April 1984, the review for concurrence of the 1974 positions was concluded by local Leagues, resulting in nine-and-a-half positions being dropped and five being reworded and regrouped to more accurately reflect the contemporary state of legislation.

In 1985 local Leagues studied the presidential preference primary, mail balloting and electronic voting. No consensus was reached on mail balloting per se. Concerning electronic voting the League concluded that engineering performance standards should address accuracy, reliability, safety and operability. Management performance standards should address completeness and clarity of documentation and accountability, security and impartiality of procedures. As chief elections officer, the secretary of state should determine that voting systems comply with the standards. To establish the continuing compliance of systems in use, the supervisors of elections should regularly report any hardware, software or management problems.

In 1987, LWVFL cosponsored with the Florida Association of Broadcasters and with the cooperation of the Florida Division of Elections a workshop on improving elections in Florida. During the 1987, 1988 and 1989 legislative sessions, LWVFL advocated and built support for various election law reforms. In 1989, LWVFL was instrumental in securing additional funding for the Florida Elections Commission and several measures to facilitate registration. A 1998 constitutional amendment equalized ballot access requirements for

all major and minor party and independent candidates. The 1999 Legislature implemented the amendment's provisions on ballot access. The bill allows all candidates to either pay a filing fee or collect signatures from 1 percent of the district's registered voters. It makes no change to the amount of the filing fee. The amendment allows all voters to participate in primary elections when only one political party fields candidates. Also, it corrects the voting age from 21 to 18, which brings Florida in line with federal requirements.

### **Election Law Reform**

The November 2000 election was unusually confrontational, confusing, and spiced with name-calling. This set the mood of the 2001 legislative session. However, LWVFL fared well on election law this session in one huge bill:

Voting systems and procedures: Punch cards, paper ballots, mechanical lever machines and central-count voting systems will not be used, beginning with the 2002 primary election. Future voting systems must tabulate votes at the precinct. The Division of Elections must review, approve, and certify new technology and provide a uniform ballot design for each certified system. Funding is provided based on the number of precincts in the county as of the 2000 General Election.

The Florida Elections Canvassing Commission will consist of the governor and two members of the Cabinet and vacancies filled with an elected official. Voters may cast a provisional ballot, which will be counted on determination of eligibility by a local canvassing board. The deadlines for county canvassing boards to certify an election will be seven days following the primary or 11 days following the general election. The same manner of recount will be done in each affected jurisdiction. An automatic machine recount or an automatic manual recount will be conducted if the margin of victory is one-half or one-quarter of one percent respectively. The automatic manual recount will involve overvotes and undervotes and a vote will count if there is "a clear indication on the ballot that the voter has made a definite choice." Any registered voter may vote by absentee vote without giving a reason.

**Voter education:** The DOE is required to adopt minimum standards for voter education. Six-million dollars were set aside for voter education and poll worker training. Counties may receive funds upon submission of a detailed description of proposed education and training programs and must report on the effectiveness of voter education programs in each county. A Voter's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities will be posted at each polling place on Election Day.

**Voter registration:** The Department of State will develop a statewide voter registration database containing registration information from all counties. A criminal penalty is provided for any supervisor of elections who willfully refuses or neglects to administer the database. A voter registration applicant will be notified to provide missing information in writing instead of being required to fill out a new application.

**Election Contests and Protests, Uniform Poll Times:** Circuit judges will no longer have unfettered discretion to order investigations to prevent or correct alleged wrong and provide appropriate relief. The Division of Elections and Florida Association of Supervisors of Elections was to conduct a study on the benefits and drawbacks of having uniform poll opening and closing times.

**What LWVFL Did Not Get in This Bill:**

- Limitation on political activity of members of local canvassing boards.
- Non-partisan elections of supervisors of elections.
- High school voter education.
- Restoration of voting rights for former felons.
- Permanent elimination of the second primary.

Following the historical Election 2000 controversy, whereby Florida took center stage in the national spotlight, the federal government passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002. It was the federal government's biggest effort to bring uniformity to the nation's election process.

**HAVA's policy objectives are to:**

- Increase state level accountability for election reforms.
- Provide new guide- lines for voting systems.
- Require provisional voting and posting of specific information for voters.
- Require new central voter registration systems.
- Align voter education and election training to meet new federal requirements.
- •Provide federal funding and require a state plan to receive federal funds.
- Establish a new federal Election Assistance Commission.

All 50 states and U.S. territories are required to develop plans to modernize voting equipment and update administrative election procedures.

A group of individuals was appointed to develop Florida's HAVA implementation plan during a series of public hearings around the state. LWVFL was represented on this planning committee. Because many election problems focused on Florida as a swing state with 25 electoral votes in the 2002 election, the 2001 state Legislature led the nation with many reforms described, as noted previously. The 2002 Legislature enacted additional election reforms, including the establishment of a statewide voter registration data base, to meet HAVA requirements. However, this Legislature narrowly interpreted HAVA and failed to pass legislation counting provisional ballots cast for all common offices, even if cast in the wrong precinct. The 2005 legislature passed another substantial election bill on the last day of the session. While it gave the secretary of state more power to establish uniform election policies statewide, abolished the runoff primary, and created penalties for voter harassment or intimidation and for voter fraud that the League can support, it also limited the number of hours that polls can be open for early voting, imposed rules on

groups, but not political parties, involved in registering voters, and mandated a photo ID requirement to vote.

Voter confidence in the voting process was boosted when the 2007 legislature passed legislation requiring that all voting machines used in Florida provide a voter verified paper trail (VVPT). While the League applauded this security measure, this same legislature introduced, in the opinion of the League, numerous and significant barriers to voting as, for example, limiting the types of photo voter ID, moving the state primary up to before Labor Day, amending but not rescinding, third party voter registration rules, and reducing the interval for a voter to provide identifying information to validate a provisional ballot. The League remains diligent monitoring election administration including maintaining security, accuracy, recountability (audits), and accessibility in the election process for voters, protecting the right to vote for all citizens, and guarding against the introduction of any barriers to voting including voter IDs, restrictions on early voting, and infringement on the functioning of third party voter registration groups.

In his report to the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee in early 2009, the Secretary of State was exuberant in his reporting on the flawless 2008 election. All the work put into creating a system that worked well had proved successful. Early voting was touted as one of the reasons the election went so smoothly.

Unfortunately, the situation changed during the 2011 session. A bill was introduced that was so onerous, it was labeled "the voter suppression bill." The Governor signed the bill. HB1355 reduced the number of early voting days, put more restrictions on third party voter registration groups, and required voters moving from one county to another to vote a provisional ballot. This last requirement affected many college students and low-income voters. The legislature put eleven amendments on the ballot; this required more vote time and resulted in long lines at the polls. Once again, Florida became a "poster child" for "How Not to Run an Election."

The 2013 legislature, with the encouragement of the Governor, attempted to remedy the situation. Supervisors of Election from several counties, including those with problems at the polls, spoke before the Senate Ethics and Elections committee and the House subcommittee on Ethics and Elections. While the House passed the Elections Reform bill on the first day of the session, the Senate went through most of the session before their bill was passed. Although Election Law Reform was a priority for the legislature, the bill that would eliminate many of the problems of the 2012 election was not passed until the last week of the session.

**Good things the bill does:**

- Significantly increases the hours and days for early voting
- Supervisors of Elections have more flexibility in choosing early voting sites.
- Mandates a seventy-five-word limit on the first version of ballot summaries for

- constitutional amendments proposed by the Legislature.
- Allows a voter to “fix” an absentee ballot that is “spoiled” because a signature has changed or is missing.
- Allows voters in most Florida counties who have moved to make an address change at the polls on Election Day.

The law does not mandate early voting on the Sunday before an election or expedited voting for elderly and disabled people; these were items the League had supported. The bill also requires a written request for absentee ballots that are to be sent to an address other than the voter’s home address; an amendment to the bill exempts the military from this requirement.

### **Second primary**

In 1985, after a year’s study, the League adopted a position to eliminate the second primary. Subsequently, at the 1985 Convention, delegates approved by concurrence to add the following to the position: “Plurality nomination will determine the winner of the primary election,” meaning that the candidate with the largest number of votes would win. In 1993-94 Florida Leagues reevaluated the position and could not reach a consensus as to whether the position should be retained. The position was dropped; however, there was support for election by super plurality (less than a majority).

For the third time, the primary question was addressed during the 1995-1997 biennium. Again, local Leagues reached a consensus to eliminate the second primary but to accept super plurality winners if the second primary system is retained. A 2001 law provided that for the 2002 election only, the Second Primary be eliminated. Again in 2003 and 2004, the Legislature continued the elimination of the second primary. In 2005, the Legislature made the suspension permanent, as the League supports.

Campaign finance reform. In 1986 the study of campaign finance reform was completed, and a position was announced by the LWVFL Board. The position included public financing, limits on contributions and expenditures, disclosure, and regulatory agency responsibilities.

In 1991 the League lobbied successfully for campaign finance reform, keystones of which were partial public financing of gubernatorial and Cabinet races and campaign contribution limits. During the 1997 legislative session, LWVFL and Common Cause Florida lobbyists cooperated on the legislative priorities of campaign finance and legislative rules reform. They were instrumental in preventing the repeal of the Florida Elections Campaign Financing Act.

The 1997 omnibus election reform bill transferred the Florida Elections Commission to the Department of Legal Affairs and provided a separate budget entity; clarified that committees of a national, state or county level of political parties are included in allocable contributions made to candidates by the parties; provided a penalty for political party

contributions of more than the \$50,000 limit; limited turnback's to political parties to \$10,000; provided enhanced penalties for late filing of campaign reports and repeat violations of contribution provisions; prohibited the receipt of earmarked funds by political parties; required "approved by" disclaimers on political advertisements or certain political telephone calls on behalf of a candidate; and made receipt of filing fees and party assessments by political parties contingent upon not making independent expenditures during the election cycle.

A constitutional amendment in 1998 provided that when candidates for statewide public office agree to limit campaign expenditures, they qualify for limited public funding. This stabilizes the current campaign finance law. The 2001 Election Law Reform Act provided that contributions to candidates by out-of-state residents will no longer be counted toward the threshold to receive public financing and cannot be used as qualifying matching contributions. The definition of a Political Action Committee was rewritten, and more disclosure requirements were established for Committees of Continuing Existence and other entities making independent expenditures to political campaigns. During the 2002 legislative session LWVFL became aware of a ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit on a case filed by Florida Right to Life Inc. The court ruled on another issue in a larger section of campaign finance law that, because of its proximity, struck the sentence, "...prohibiting anyone from making a contribution in the name of another." Because of the limited time left in the legislative session and the importance of preventing another loophole in campaign finance laws, the League drafted its own bill asking the Legislature to reinsert the vital language in the law to prevent anyone from making a contribution in the name of another. The bill was sponsored and passed in both houses. This requirement has prevented individuals and corporations from gaining undue influence with elected officials.

The 2005 Legislature slipped into the election reform bills at the last minute an increase in the public campaign financing spending limits. For the governor's race, the spending limit increases from \$6 million to \$20 million. They also increased the amount of soft money a political party can contribute directly to a candidate from \$50,000 to \$250,000. These questionable campaign finance provisions were never heard in committee and appeared as amendments on the floor at the final moment. They are clearly inconsistent with the intent of public financing to hold down the cost of campaigns.

In the 2006 session, the League took a small step forward on campaign finance reform. Legislation passed calling for transparency of contributions from special interest groups to elected officials but not contribution limits. And although not campaign financing per se, passed legislation prohibiting public officials from working on campaigns while they are in office and from representing clients before a board or committee on which they have served until two years have elapsed.

In 2007, a plethora of good campaign finance bills were introduced but, unfortunately,

they all died in committee. Two topics made their inaugural appearances: a truth in political advertising bill and a bill that would prohibit local governments from using public funds to lobby the public to vote for or against a proposed constitutional amendment or a local referendum.

In 2008, a bill was introduced that would prohibit the use of public funds by a local government entity to advocate for a specific position in an issue campaign. While the bill did not pass during the 2008 session, it reappeared during the 2009 session, passed the House and Senate and was signed into law by the Governor. The League supported the restricting of how governmental money may be spent. A Senate joint resolution was introduced that would repeal the "Florida Election Campaign Financing Act". The League supported the original amendment that limited the amount spent in the Governor's and Cabinet races and provided matching funds. The League opposed this resolution, and, instead, asked legislators to roll back the spending limits to pre-2005 limits. An amendment that would roll back the spending limits was introduced in the House and passed unanimously. Neither the bill containing this amendment, nor the resolution was picked up in the Senate. However, during the 2009 session, the resolution appeared again. While Common Cause and the League spoke out against it in every committee meeting, the joint resolution was passed in both houses and will appear on the 2010 ballot. The House also amended the bill so that spending limits would revert back to pre-2005 limits if the amendment is not supported by 60% of the electorate. Of course, the League is opposed to repealing the public campaign financing program; we believe that public financing of elections is the best way to ensure open elections and maximum citizen participation in the political process. The intent of the 1998 amendment was to help hold down campaign costs by providing an incentive to candidates who choose to abide by spending limits; they receive public money. It also prevents individuals and corporations from gaining undue influence over elected officials. The raising of the spending limits by the 2005 legislature resulted in huge election price tags and a backlash against public financing. Legislators used this cost as a reason to repeal the amendment, when, in fact, they were responsible for raising the limits.

In 2010, Florida citizens refused to pass the amendment that would repeal campaign finance reform.

However, during the 2010 legislative session a bill was passed that legitimized and created new campaign fund- raising accounts that would be under the direct control of legislative leaders; the latter would be able to raise unlimited contributions to bolster the campaigns of their legislative supporters and could fundraise year round, even during the legislative session. These are commonly referred to as "Leadership Funds" and have been banned in the state. The bill was vetoed by the Governor.

During the 2011 session, both houses of the legislature voted to override the veto and legislative leaders now can raise special interest campaign money on a large scale.

Another bill that would increase the limits on contributions directly to the candidates from \$500 per election cycle was brought up in the Senate. There would be a tiered approach, where a party could contribute up to \$10,000 to a gubernatorial candidate, \$5,000 to a cabinet candidate, \$2,500 to a legislative candidate and \$1,000 to a county candidate. It had no companion bill in the House and died in the Rules Committee.

### **Campaign Finance Reform**

Along with election law reform and ethics reform, campaign finance reform loomed large in the 2013 legislative session. Both the Senate President and Speaker of the House named campaign finance reform as a priority. The struggle to get this legislation through both houses took most of the session. While the House's plan raised contribution limits to candidates from \$500 to \$10,000, the Senate bill maintained the current \$500 limit. However, the Speaker felt that there was room for negotiation. The final bill enhances reporting and disclosure requirements, eliminates the political committees known as CCEs (committees of continuing existence), and places a limit on the amount of surplus campaign funds that can be given to political parties. The bill also raises the contribution limit for statewide races to \$3,000 per election cycle and \$1,000 for local and legislative races. Political committees can accept unlimited contributions and make unlimited independent expenditures and allows a candidate to carry-over \$20,000 from one election cycle to another for a re-election campaign. LWVFL opposed raising the amount of money individuals can contribute to candidates, fearing that there will be fewer contributions from ordinary Florida voters. The League also opposes the carry-over of \$20,000 by incumbents; this unfairly benefits incumbents. A letter was sent to the Governor asking him to veto the bill; however, it was signed into law during the last week of the session.

### **Motor Voter**

The League supported a 1991 motor voter bill, which did not pass the Legislature, that would have provided for voter registration in Florida at driver's license bureaus. The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) endorsed by LWVUS passed the Congress in 1993 and took effect Jan. 1, 1995. This act allows citizens to apply to register to vote at various sites including driver's license offices, government assistance agencies, military recruitment offices and by mail.

In 1994, a League member was appointed by the governor to the Coordinating Council of the NVRA, a statewide committee charged with developing Florida guidelines for conforming to the implementation of the NVRA. Florida was one of the first states to have its guidelines accepted by the Federal Election Commission.

### **Former felons**

Since the League was unsuccessful in getting the automatic restoration of voting rights for former felons included in the broad 2001 election reform bill and the modifications



thereto demanded by the federal HAVA law in the following session, the League joined with like-minded voting rights groups in March 2003 to form the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC). The long-term goal of the FRRC is to change the Florida Constitution from banning civil rights to former felons after completion of a sentence.

In the short term, the FRRC began work on three fronts: The Legislature; the administration; the courts. The League supported statutes to streamline the cumbersome rights restoration process, lobbied the Executive Clemency Board to modify its rights restoration hearing rules and in 2005 filed an amicus curiae brief in the U.S. Supreme Court regarding *Johnson vs. Bush*, a class action on behalf of 600,000 former felons, challenging the constitutionality of the Florida ban on automatic rights restoration. The Supreme Court denied the plaintiffs a hearing.

The 2006 Legislature did pass legislation whereby administrators in county detention facilities must provide application forms for restoration of civil rights to released detainees convicted of a felony. Then in April 2007, the Executive Clemency Board adopted new rules restoring rights automatically to felons convicted and released thereafter for non-violent crimes. While the League applauded this progress, the Executive Clemency Board had not clearly addressed restoring rights to those felons released before this Executive Clemency Board rules change — an estimated 950,000 people. Within the FRRC the League continues to work to achieve automatic restoration of rights to former felons upon completion of their sentence.

During the 2008 session, the FRRC organized a lobbying day for members to meet with their legislators, asking for the restoration of rights to convicted felons who are released from prison. In 2009, the group held a press conference in Tallahassee where many legislators spoke in support of the group.

Unfortunately, there has been very little progress in the area of restoring the rights of convicted felons who have been released from prison. According to the ACLU, the state still lags far behind the majority of states in eradicating the Reconstruction-era voting ban. More than 86% of the 28,000 ex-offender-initiated applications submitted since January 2006 are piled up on bureaucratic desks and have not yet been submitted to the Clemency Board for review. "Automatic" restoration of rights does not exist.

Prior to the 2010 session, one representative has called for a rollback of the 2007 clemency rule changes, claiming they present an endangerment to public safety.

Voting rights for felons became an issue during the 2000 presidential election when thousands of black voters in Florida were purged from the rolls because the voter database misidentified them as felons. In the past ten years, some progress had been made to restore the rights of convicted felons.

While many have felt that the restoration of rights has been progressing at too slow a pace during the past few years, no one expected the clemency board to completely undermine the progress made thus far. Early in 2011, the newly elected Attorney General expressed the opinion that there should be rules changes regarding convicted felons.

**The new rules passed by the Clemency Board are:**

Felons convicted of non-violent crimes can apply to have their rights restored without a hearing five years after they have completed their sentences and paid restitution. Felons convicted of violent crimes, including murder and DUI manslaughter, must wait seven years, request a hearing and win approval in the hearing to have their rights restored.

All felons must wait eight years before they can apply for the right to carry a firearm; previously they could seek a waiver to apply earlier.

All felons must wait 10 years before applying for a pardon; previously a waiver to apply could be sought earlier. Persons who have been granted or denied any form of executive clemency may not apply for further executive clemency for at least 2 years from the date that such action became final.

Several legislators and representatives from the ACLU, League of Women Voters, and NAACP appeared before the Clemency Board, testifying that felons who have completed their sentences and paid restitution should not have to wait an extra number of years to have their rights restored. At the time of the hearing, there was a backlog of 98,000 former felons who have applied to have their rights restored; the process is slow and arduous.

The Clemency Board moved with “uncommon speed” and voted unanimously to impose the strict new rules on ex-felons who are seeking the right to vote. The vote nullifies the policy adopted in 2007 by a different governor and a different clemency board that attempted to streamline the procedure and help ex-offenders to become productive citizens.

Copies of the proposed rule change were not made available to the public prior to the start of the meeting and public testimony was limited to two minutes per person for a total of thirty minutes.

During the session, a bill that would remove the link between restoration of rights and occupational licensing was signed into law. The bill prohibits state agencies from denying an application for a license, permit, certificate, or employment based solely on a person's lack of civil rights. Former felons now have more job options, but they don't have the right to vote.

The 2013 legislative session did not address the issue of rights restoration for

ex-felons. According to news reports, just 370 restorations have been approved since the new rules went into effect in 2011. Previously, in the four years prior to the ruling in 2011, 154, 178 people had their rights restored. It is estimated that by the end of 2014, there could be as many as 600,000 people who do not have the right to vote. Southern states, including Florida, have resisted the trend to automatically restore civil rights to ex-felons. The struggle for restoration of rights for ex-felons continues in Florida. Presently, there is a petition drive to get a proposed constitutional amendment on the 2016 ballot. However, the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition does not have the financial support needed to get the required number of signatures in time to make the ballot.

Laws passed by the legislature that reduce the amount of time to collect signatures make it difficult to do without using paid petition gatherers.

Twenty-two states allow ex-felons to vote after completion of their sentences, parole or probation. In Maine and Vermont, prisoners currently serving terms are able to vote. Eleven other states have imposed onerous restrictions. In Florida, 10 percent of voting-age residents have been disqualified because of a record of imprisonment in a state penitentiary; this includes more than 1 in 5 African Americans of voting age. According to the Sentencing Project, "Florida has the highest and most racially disparate rate of disenfranchisement. Of the estimated 5.8 million Americans nationwide, who are affected by these laws, approximately one quarter of them — 1.5 million — live in Florida, where only 6 percent of the U.S. population resides."

In 2009 and 2010, voting rights were restored to more than 30,000 ex-felons in Florida. In 2013 and 2014, that number dropped to 911.

A bill was introduced in the 2015 session that would put a constitutional amendment restoring ex-felons' rights on the 2016 ballot. While it was assigned to four committees, it did not get a hearing and died in the Ethics and Election committee.

Voter registration database

As required by HAVA, the Legislature enacted election laws to implement a statewide data base of registered voters before Jan. 1, 2006. It was to be a single, uniform, official, centralized, interactive, computerized statewide voter registration list run by the Department of Elections, rather than the multiple data bases heretofore managed by county officials. It was intended to alleviate questions concerning voter registration encountered at polls in a standard manner. However, the state of Florida included a "data base match" requirement for adding a new voter to the rolls. The state matches a potential voter's name to either the Social Security Administration database or to the Department of Motor Vehicles database before allowing that person to register to vote. The League believes that this matching process is disenfranchising eligible voters from voting and has argued in Op-Eds published statewide that Florida's law is inconsistent with HAVA. In late 2007, civil rights advocates challenged this provision in federal court. The court enjoined the law. The lower court decision, at press time, was under review by the federal Court of

Appeals.

Several rules workshops on maintaining the state voter database were held during the fall of 2009. Supervisors from around the state gave their input on adding or deleting names from the database. The discussions included active and inactive voters, moving from one county to another, exceptions such as military personnel who move but would rather keep their voting information at their previous address. Supervisors are wrestling with the ambiguities presented by current law.

In 2023, Convention delegates voted to support encouraging the Florida Division of Elections to establish a database or clearing house for Returning Citizens to confirm voter registration eligibility.

In 2025, Convention delegates voted to support notifying registered voters that Vote-By-Mail ballot requests must be renewed. This was done due to passage of SB 90 by the 2021 Florida legislature, which states one vote-by-mail ballot request is "deemed sufficient to receive a vote-by-mail ballot for all elections through the end of the calendar year of the next regularly scheduled general election." See Florida Statutes 101.62(1)(a).

### **Third Party Voter Registration**

On the last day of the 2005 session, Legislators passed another election bill that created, in the opinion of the League, more barriers to the voting process including stringent regulations for private-sector voter registration drives. The League suspended all voter registration activities across the state in March 2006; and then filed a complaint, *League of Women Voters vs. Cobb* in federal court in Miami in May 2006 to block Fla. Laws 2005-277, Secs. 2 and 7 arguing that this law trampled constitutional rights by imposing crippling fines and burdensome reporting requirements on voter registration groups, except political parties. In August 2006, the Miami Federal District Court granted the League and co-plaintiffs a preliminary injunction blocking enforcement of this third-party voter registration law. Local Leagues resumed voter registration activities; the defendant appealed. The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, the Advancement Project in Washington, DC, and Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP in New York City represented LWVFL in this successful suit.

Then, the 2007 Legislature passed provisions amending the enjoined 2006 third party voter registration law. The League has entered into a stipulation with the Florida secretary of state under which the state has agreed not to enforce the new voter registration law, which would otherwise have gone into effect on Jan. 1, 2008. Although either LWVFL or the state may terminate this agreement, they must give 30 days' notice for this to occur.

In 2008, the League and the Florida AFL-CIO filed suit against the Secretary of State to

enjoin enforcement of Florida's voter registration law fearing that its strict deadlines and fines could be enforced in a manner that would chill voter registration efforts. This suit followed the 2006 suit which challenged a previous version of the law. In the first case, a federal court declared the original version of the law unconstitutional; the Florida legislature amended the law. In the second case, the League challenged the new, amended law. A federal judge denied the plaintiffs' request for an injunction to stop the new version of the law. But the court ruled based on an interpretation of the law that effectively reduced the amounts that organizations and individuals involved in voter registration activities could be fined. In the early months of 2009, the Secretary of State issued a rule that adopted the court's interpretation. In June 2009, both lawsuits were settled. The settlement brought about a final resolution of both the second lawsuit and the Secretary's appeal of an attorney's fees award from the first lawsuit. The settlement protects the ability of community groups to conduct voter registration drives and allowed both parties to put costly litigation behind them.

At the time of the court's decision, Secretary of State Browning had not yet proposed final rules, and the law was not be enforced until the administrative rulemaking is completed.

The November 2008 election came and went without the rulemaking having been completed. As a result, plaintiffs were able to conduct registration drives before the 2008 election.

In early 2009, the Florida Department of State, Division of Elections proposed a final rule implementing the challenged statute. The rule, which took effect on February 26, 2009, incorporated the narrowed interpretation of the statute adopted by the district court, thus codifying the court's construction of the law into a binding administrative rule and protecting plaintiffs and similar organizations from excessive fines. After the adoption of the administrative rule, the parties agreed to settle the lawsuit; on June 17, 2009, the case was dismissed pursuant to the parties' stipulation. (See [www.brennancenter.org](http://www.brennancenter.org))

Midway through the 2011 legislative session, a massive elections bill that would negatively affect third party voter registrations groups passed both Houses. The bill requires that groups registering voters must register with the state, list its officers and the names and addresses of each and every member who will be registering voters. Those members registering voters must swear an oath to uphold state election laws. All new registrations must be turned into the Supervisor's office or the State within 48 hours of signing. Each voter registration form would list the League as the registrar and require the time of registration to be written on the form.

If the deadline of 48 hours is missed, a fine will be imposed. A carry-over from the last lawsuit, the total amount an organization can be fined in any one year is \$1,000.00. Also, the rules for this legislation were written at the time of passage of the bill and went into effect immediately, except for the five counties that require preclearance by the

Department of Justice. The law was enforced by the Supervisor in Miami-Dade prior to the Governor's signing the bill and is being enforced for all elections going on in the state.

It is hard to believe that the very same type of legislation that led to the 2005 lawsuit against the State of Florida and resulted in their paying over \$300,000 in legal fees incurred by the plaintiffs is back again today. At this time, the Florida League has suspended voter registration and is weighing all options, including legal options.

Immediately following the passage of the elections bill (BB1355), the Brennan Center for Justice, representing LWVFL, Democracia, Inc., ACLU Florida, Project Vote, Rock the Vote, and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, sent a letter to Florida's Secretary of State, requesting that Florida hold off on the premature implementation of the legislation. Since five Florida counties are subject to the pre-clearance provision of the Voting Rights Act, implementation of the law would mean that two sets of election rules would be in force throughout Florida; this would be unlawful under Florida statutes. Florida law requires uniform application of election rules and procedures across the state.

However, the law did go into effect and, for the second time in the past decade, LWVFL suspended voter registration activities. In December, 2011, The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Florida, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, and Coffey Burlington, representing the League of Women Voters of Florida, Florida Public Interest Research Group Education Fund, and Rock the Vote, filed a complaint against the state of Florida in the United States District Court, Northern District of Florida. Eight months later the Judge granted a permanent injunction to the plaintiffs, striking down many of the requirements regarding third party voter registration organizations and returning the deadline for turning in registrations to ten days. LWVFL began registering voters and was able to register 4,000 voters in the weeks preceding the 2012 election.

The many restrictions that were still in force in the legislation led to long lines and polling places in the 2012 election and a delay in reporting a final vote tally. Citizens were enraged by the length of the ballot and the number of proposed constitutional amendments on the ballot. By the time the legislature returned for the 2012 session, the cry for election reform was a top priority; it was also supported by the Governor. The Florida House passed an election reform bill on the first day of the session with just one dissenting vote. The Senate labored for most of the session, but finally, in the last week of session, a bill went to the Governor.

In 2014, the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration reported "consistently affirmative assessments of the benefits that online registration can provide." Among the pluses the panel cited: It improves the accuracy and timeliness of registrations; saves states and localities money; and reduces Election Day delays due to

errors in paper-based registrations. (The federal panel's co-chairs: Jones Day partner Benjamin L. Ginsberg, former national counsel to the Bush-Cheney campaigns, and Robert F. Bauer, former White House counsel to President Obama). During the 2014 session, SB7068 was introduced. The main issue in the bill was online voter registration, a concept new to Florida although at least twenty other states use online voter registration. While LWVFL as well as many legislators and the Supervisors of Election supported this legislation, it did not survive the session. However, the bill reappeared in the 2015 session and was a top priority issue for LWVFL; it had bipartisan support and was passed overwhelmingly in both chambers. The only dissent came from the Secretary of State who feels that he does not have enough time to develop the program although the legislature gave him until 2017 to do so. States that have implemented online voting registration did it in a matter of months; some supervisors say that it should only take approximately three months to get the program up and running.

In September of 2017, the League sent a letter to Secretary of State Ken Detzner outlining several concerns we have regarding the roll out of the statewide online voter registration system. These concerns included: (1) the online form required both a valid Florida driver's license number and the last four digits of a Social Security number, while the paper form only requires a Social Security number if the applicant does not possess a driver's license or Florida identification card. According to SB 228, no legal distinction may be made between a traditional paper voter registration form and the online registration form. (2) The online form does not allow for the entry of a third-party voter registration organization number. Third party organizations could face severe fines and penalties by not complying with the law.

The League offered its assistance to the Secretary of State in any way possible to have a seamless launch that was compliant with the law. Online voter registration was fully implemented on October 1, 2017. The issues that the League raised to the Secretary of State remained.

### **Open Primaries**

Florida uses the plurality voting system, in which each voter chooses a single candidate and the candidate with the most votes wins. This system allows a candidate to win with fewer than 50 percent of the votes if there are more than two candidates. At the League 2005 convention, delegates decided to study the issue of alternative voting systems to determine if any alternatives to Florida's present system of plurality voting should be recommended. On behalf of the state League, the LWV of the St. Petersburg Area undertook a study of the many methods for tabulating votes and shared this accumulated background information with other local Leagues. Following statewide local League consensus meetings, the League of Women Voters of Florida announced a new Election Law, Voting Process position making the method of instant runoff voting a recommended alternative to plurality voting.

At the League 2015 convention, delegates decided to study the issue of whether the Florida closed primary election system was a hindrance to voter turnout. Voter turnout in the 2014 primary election was only 17.6 percent of registered voters. From 2000 to 2016, voter turnout averaged 23 percent. Nationally voter turnout averaged 37 percent indicating that Florida needed change. Following the convention, a statewide study committee was formed to evaluate reasons for and solutions to turnout coupled with an evaluation of alternative primary election systems. Evaluation of Presidential Preference Primary elections was also included in the study. In early 2017 over 20 local leagues participated in consensus meetings to determine consensus on both primary election systems and other actions independent of election systems (Example: Automatic registration at age 18). The leagues overwhelmingly reached consensus that the closed primary election system was, in fact, a hindrance to voter turnout. In addition, the local leagues reached consensus that No Party Affiliate (NPA) and minor party voters should be given the opportunity to vote in primary elections. Over 3.4 million NPA and minor party voters are currently excluded from primaries unless they register with a party holding a primary. The local leagues also achieved consensus recommending statewide use of a form of Open primary election systems that would allow for the broadest possible voter participation, including NPA and minor party affiliated voters. Open Primaries also provide access to a broader slate of candidates that would increase voter participation. The Leagues also achieved consensus that Presidential Preference Primaries be an Open Primary replacing the current closed primary. The Leagues did not embrace Instant Runoff Voting given concerns over complexity, potential voter confusion and lack of state level election experience with Instant Runoff Voting.

Open Primaries work as follows: The Open Primary would retain a party ballot for voters to choose without having to register with the party holding the primary. All voters would be allowed to participate in an open primary regardless of their party affiliation or lack thereof. Voters would not be allowed to cross party lines to choose candidates from a different party on an individual race-by-race.

### **Other Election Laws**

In addition to consensus on primary election systems the 20 leagues achieved consensus on other election law provisions: (1) Implement automatic voter registration at age 18 with an opt-out feature if a person did not want to be registered to vote. Voters would be registered initially as NPA and have a specified number of days to inform the registering agency to change their party affiliation. (2) Implement threshold criteria for Write-in candidates to prevent manipulation of Universal Primaries. (3) Make election voting portable within a county to enable the broadest voter access eliminating the requirement to vote in a specified precinct. This change would not change the Supervisors of Election process of adjusting precincts based on previous election data and changes in registered voter rolls. (4) Implement Election Day Registration (EDR) to allow potential voters to register and vote on the same day. This feature would be implemented when administratively feasible. Electronic Registration Information Center ((ERIC) would need



to be adopted by Florida as part of EDR implementation. ERIC is supported in the 2015-2017 Study and Action positions adopted at the May 2015 Convention.

Election Law positions follow.

## **LWVFL Election Law Positions**

### **Voter Registration**

1. Provide well identified and well publicized registration locations.
2. Establish permanent and/or movable registration locations that are easily accessible.
3. Display registration qualifications prominently.
4. Set registration hours to meet community needs.
5. Use deputy registrars liberally.
6. Register voters up to and including Election Day as soon as administratively feasible.
7. Measure any new techniques for registration against the following criteria: expense, absence of partisan influence, availability to poorly motivated citizens, susceptibility to fraud.
8. Provide for automatic registration of eligible voters. (2017)

### **Voting Process**

1. Provide clear and easy-to-use write-in procedures for all voting systems.
2. Provide a writing implement.
3. Allow for presidential write-ins by candidate name instead of elector names.
4. Maintain a simple absentee voting procedure.
5. Issue an absentee ballot in response to a single request.
6. Disqualify an absentee vote only if the identity of the voter or intent of vote is in doubt.
7. Reduce the number of elections and provide for uniform scheduling including municipal elections. (1984)
8. Recommend statewide use of an Open Primary election system that would allow for the broadest possible voter participation, including No Party and Minor Party affiliate voters. Open primaries also provide access to a broader slate of candidates that would increase voter participation. (2017)
9. Establish threshold criteria for write-in candidates that more closely mirror current requirements for announced candidates. The presence of a write in candidate as the only opponent shall not close the primary. (2017)

### **Voter Education**

1. Require county supervisors to report to the people regularly on the percentage of registration and voting by precincts.
2. Provide for wording of ballot issues in lay language.
3. Provide bilingual assistance where appropriate. (1984)

## **Administration of Elections**

1. Elect supervisors of elections on a non-partisan basis.
2. Retain all county administrative election procedures in the office of the supervisor of elections.
3. Assign the chief elections officer the responsibility for training and setting standards for all election personnel.
4. Provide well-trained, impartial elections personnel.
5. Maintain mandatory state rules with provision for enforcement.
6. Maintain standardized election procedures.
7. Add to the duties of the Florida Elections Commission the responsibility to investigate elections procedures, hear complaints, and make recommendations for change.
8. Shorten the campaign period. (1984)
9. Make election voting portable within the county to enable the broadest voter access. (2017)

## **Equal Access**

1. Allow physically confined citizens to register and vote, including citizens in prisons awaiting adjudication, non-felons in prison, confined mental patients not judged incompetent and citizens in nursing homes, hospitals, etc.
2. Restore a felon's civil rights automatically when his debt to society is paid.
3. Provide for keeping voter lists current without penalizing the citizen who does not choose to vote regularly.
4. Include on registration identification cards instructions on how to change name, address, and party affiliation. (1984)
5. NPAs (No Party Affiliation) and minor party voters should have an opportunity to vote in all primary elections. (2017)

## **Presidential Primary**

1. The presidential preference primary ballot should include the names of the presidential candidates, not the names of the delegates to convention. (1985)
2. Replace Florida's present closed Presidential Preference Primary with an open primary system of voting. (2017)

## **Mail Balloting**

If balloting is by mail, there should be mandatory matching of signatures and adequate penalties for fraud. (1985) Support state funding of return postage for Vote-By-Mail ballots in all counties when Congressional and Florida legislative offices are on the ballot (2021)

## **Electronic Voting Systems**

To ensure the integrity of the voting process, to promote public confidence in voting and

to provide uniformly reliable vote tallying throughout Florida, the League supports establishment by law of performance standards of all hardware, software and management elements of voting systems considered for public use within the state. Voting systems should be certified for use by the secretary of state. Determination of compliance should be an ongoing process covering new systems, changes in systems, and systems in use. (1985)

### **Campaign finance**

- Public funding: Given a system of public funding for political campaigns, the League of Women Voters of Florida supports the use of such funds for races for statewide candidates, with these funds to be channeled directly to the candidates. (1986)

### **Contribution/expenditure limits**

1. The League of Women Voters of Florida supports limitations on the amount and types of campaign contributions, specifically continuing the dollar limits as provided in Florida Statutes. (1985)
2. Independent expenditures should be regulated. (1986)

### **Disclosure**

1. Reporting forms should include the source of funds by category and expenditure by category. All reports should be cumulative. If post-election contributions are received, they should be reported with the same detail as pre-election contributions.
2. Random audits of campaign records should be required, the selection to be made from all races, with emphasis on those for statewide offices and the Legislature. (1986)

### **Florida Elections Commission**

The proceedings of the Florida Elections Commission should be confidential until probable cause is established and thereafter all matters should be open to the public. Willfulness should not be a criterion for establishing guilt or innocence with regard to campaign law violations. (1986)

### **Regulatory Agency Responsibilities**

The state should establish a single repository for copies of all campaign records. Reports should also be filed at the appropriate levels. A government agency should be designated to analyze, summarize, and publish reports based on the data collected. (1986)

### **Second Primary**

If a second primary is re-established, super-plurality (a designated minimum percent that is less than a majority) should determine the winner without a runoff election. However, a runoff election would be necessary if no candidate attained a super plurality. (2017)

# Education in Florida

Support a free public secular school system for Florida with high standards for student achievement and with equality of educational opportunity for all that is financed adequately by the state through an equitable funding formula. Establish a statewide Civics Education Subcommittee under the state Education committee.

Education in Florida has been of continuing interest to the league of Women Voters for almost seven decades. The League conducted a major study every ten years that ranged from district organizational issues, appointed superintendents, equitable funding, curriculum standards, and pupil progression to teacher quality. efforts to improve achievement and accountability, and the impact of education reform through school choice. While Florida has received national recognition for its choice policies, the State has had limited success in improving its academic standing. The history of the Florida experience illustrates the complexity of the efforts to improve educational systems.

By the mid-1990s, state educational policy began a shift toward the expansion of school choice with proposals to incorporate public financing of private schools through vouchers and tax credit scholarships. Choice was expanded in 1996 when the legislature authorized publicly funded, privately managed charter schools.

At its biennial Convention in May 1999, the League adopted a project to monitor Florida charter schools. A statewide study of the impact of charter schools in 2013-2014 resulted in a series of recommendations to improve charter school reauthorization, management, and oversight policies.

During that same period, 2003 Convention delegates began an evaluation of the state's shift to annual standardized testing of students which is ongoing.

## System Issues

In 1945 Governor Millard F. Caldwell appointed the Florida Citizens Committee on Education the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) proposed to the Legislature in 1947. The program called for the abolishment of all small school districts and the establishment of new countywide school districts. Each district (county) was required to provide tax support based upon its ability to pay, and the state itself would augment this with the funds necessary to build a sound minimum school program for all children wherever domiciled. The League's first action in behalf of education in Florida was support for the MFP, based on the League's first study. In 1958 the League of Women Voters of Florida adopted a new study called "Education in Florida," which dealt with the quality of education in Florida and with district (county) school structure and organization. It was out of this study, completed in 1962, that the League arrived at its position in support of an appointed superintendent of schools. The same stud led to positions supporting a non-salaried School Board, elected countywide, and dropping the office of school trustee. Perhaps the most important position reached in the 1958-60 study was League's support

of a free public-school system for Florida with equality of educational opportunity for all.

### **Financing**

In 1968 the League adopted another very complex study of Education in Florida, concentrating on financing issues and the structure and organization of education at the state level. At the completion of the study in 1971, League members agreed that the state should be the major source of financial support for education, including capital outlay. The League also expanded its position on an equalization formula and said that all state required programs (categoricals) should be fully funded by the state. The League study also led to new positions on increased appropriations for teachers' salaries, accompanied by support of measures to encourage excellence in teaching. The League agreed to support the weighted pupil concept as the unit for the distribution of funds and agreed that ad valorem taxes should be the primary local revenue source for education. They believed that each local school district should have the authority to tax itself to supplement the available funds.

This massive study enabled the League to support the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) in 1973. It was established to replace the original Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) as the basis for education funding. Many of the components of the new FEFP, such as the equalization formula, the weighted pupil concept and categorical funding of state-required programs, were supported by the League. Uniform assessment of property throughout the state was a basic requirement if the formula was to achieve its goal. Members agreed that the state Board of Education should be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate or Legislature, rather than being composed of the elected members of the state Cabinet. The League also concluded that the chief state school officer (commissioner of education) should be appointed rather than elected and should be the administrative officer of the state Board of Education.

### **Achievement**

During the '70s, there was increased interest in raising education in Florida to the top quartile nationally in terms of teacher salaries and pupil achievement. The League supported a proposed statewide five-year plan for reaching that goal, based on our adopted positions on improving academic standards. An emergency study was adopted in 1979 to address the concept of state-mandated requirements for pupil progression and graduation. As a result of that study, the League supported statewide pupil progression standards, developed by the Department of Education, to be met by each local school district. In regard to graduation requirements, the League members agreed to support statewide minimum competency standards and successful performance on a state-mandated competency test. In the 1983 *Debra P. vs. Turlington* case, the court upheld the validity of such a test.

In 1982, a newly completed League restudy of taxes supported an increase in the sales tax to five cents with a portion of the increase dedicated to education. In 1984 League members worked successfully for passage of a constitutional amendment that would

allow expanded use of gross receipts utility taxes for construction of education facilities. This was a technical amendment that was needed to ensure that funds for school construction would not be reduced when the phone companies were deregulated. In 1986 the League successfully lobbied for the Dropout Prevention Act, which allows districts to generate FEFP funds for creative and positive programs for students who are disruptive, disinterested or unsuccessful in traditional programs. The Florida lottery amendment was passed in 1986 and is primarily funding the Bright Futures Scholarships to colleges and universities. A portion of the revenue supports various incentive/award programs for schools and teachers. The 1987-89 education study that, as mentioned previously, not only readdressed the subject of financing education (1987), but dealt with teacher professionalism, certification and compensation (1988).

Regarding the enhanced role of teachers in their schools, the League reached positions to support giving teachers a voice in determining the goals and policies of their school and a greater degree of accountability, state-required teacher certification standards plus alternative licensing programs, state guidelines for teacher contracts and positive recognition and increased salaries for teachers. Members also agreed with the concept of national certification for teachers through a national board of teaching standards.

### **Education Reform and Accountability**

The Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability was established to oversee the changes and ensure implementation of Blueprint 2000 in a timely manner. In 1991, this innovative program shifted much of the decision making and priority setting from the Legislature to the local school level. In 1993 the League agreed to monitor the implementation of the education accountability program at the local level. A report of this two-year project was presented to League members at the LWVF Convention in 1995, and widely distributed to government and school district officials. In February 1996, LWVF adopted a lengthy position statement. In brief, the LWVF supports local control of schools, with transfer of appropriate decision-making responsibilities from state and district levels to representative school-site councils (School Advisory Councils or SACs) at local schools, including an advisory role regarding the school's budget, personnel and instructional program, with the principal having final decision-making authority. Improved student performance should be the highest priority of the school-site council (SAC).

During Governor Bush's tenure from 1998-2006, Florida enacted the A+ program that created school grades and teacher evaluations based on annual state-wide test scores. Pay based on student test score gains (Student Success Act) led to an unsuccessful federal lawsuit in 2013.

### **Vouchers**

By the mid-1990s, State educational policy began a shift toward the expansion of school choice with proposals to incorporate public financing of private schools through vouchers and tax credit scholarships. In November 1994, the LWVF Board approved a

motion to oppose the use of public funds in the form of vouchers or direct payments to non- public schools based on LWVF positions in support of a free public-school system for Florida with equality of educational opportunity for all. The governor's A+ plan linked FCAT results with several consequences. Schools were rated based on results of the FCAT testing and teacher evaluations were based in part on student gain scores on state tests.

In 1999 the League joined the constitutional challenge that had been filed by the Coalition for Public Education with an amicus brief. The bases for this litigation included the first Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Freedom of Religion), and Article I, Section 3 (no revenue of the state may be taken from the public treasury to aid any church or any sectarian institution) and Article IX, Sections 1 and 6 of the Florida Constitution (The state is required to provide high quality education in free public schools, and the income and principal from the school fund may only support free public schools). While the League has no position on the separation of church and state issue, we have strong positions supporting the three sections of the Florida Constitution. The schools accepting the vouchers are under no obligation to hire certified teachers, to provide accountability or to follow any of the guidelines public schools must follow.

In 2001, Florida legislature enacted the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship (FTC) program that allows corporations to contribute to non-profit scholarship organizations (Step Up for Children) that provide tuition support to private, mostly religious schools. As the legislature increased the funding base over time as well as the family income qualifications, the FTC program expanded exponentially. The legislature also created the McKay vouchers/scholarship program for students with disabilities to allow those students to qualify for state vouchers for private schooling. Personal Learning Accounts were enacted in 2014 for families with students who had certain severe disabilities. Finally, in January 2006, the Florida Supreme Court struck down the Opportunity Scholarship Program ruling that the State Constitution bars using taxpayer money to finance a private alternative to the public system. A version of this program remained for public school students at low performing schools to support their transfer to other public schools.

In November 2012, Florida voters defeated Amendment 8 titled "Religious Freedom," one of the most controversial on the ballot, by 56 percent. The proposal would have repealed the 127-year-old Blaine Amendment, which says state funds may not go to the support of religious institutions.

Expansion of the FTC program in 2014 led to the McCall vs. Scott et al. lawsuit. The League joined the FEA as a plaintiff. The complaint contended that the FTC scholarship program was unconstitutional under Article IX of the Florida constitution and harmed public education. In January 2017, the Florida Supreme Court declined jurisdiction.

## **Charter Schools**

Choice was expanded in 1996 when the legislature authorized publicly funded, privately

managed charter schools. At its biennial Convention in May 1999, the League adopted a project to monitor Florida charter schools. The largely uncontrolled growth and lack of adequate oversight of charters resulted press reports of fiscal mismanagement and academic failures. A statewide study of the impact of charter schools in 2013-14 resulted in a series of recommendations to improve charter school authorization, management and oversight policies.

In September 2017, the Florida Supreme Court declined jurisdiction in the case: School Board of Palm Beach County vs. Florida Charter Educational Foundation. The complaint argued that the charter did not meet the purposes cited Florida Statutes Section 1002.33 (b). Specifying the purpose of charter schools to fill unmet needs is a priority recommendation in the 2012-13 League study.

### **Quality**

The focus on the expansion of school choice and the funding cuts to public education evoked concern about the deterioration of the quality of the system. In August 1996, the Crossroads Conference on Education Funding in Florida was cosponsored by the League of Women Voters of Florida and the Florida PTA. The theme of the conference was "Florida's Education Crossroads: Funding for Excellence or Mediocrity?" A representative group of delegates from across the state was brought together to examine the issues surrounding the education funding crisis facing Florida. They were asked to listen to facts, analyze and evaluate myths and misconceptions about education, and search for solutions to the state's funding problems.

The result of this effort was a Crossroads Conference Statement, produced as the consensus of the delegate body. The statement, which follows, was significant because it reflected the conclusions of a very diverse group of Florida citizens who represented all strata of political thought and opinion: "Funding for education in Florida is inadequate — and misinformation about it is rampant — but it should be increased only if it is tied to a system of higher expectations, strict accountability and programs that directly affect children, such as quality teachers, instructional materials, reduced class size, technology, preschool programs and facilities." A final report of the Crossroads Conference was prepared and distributed widely to all legislators, policymakers, and others who provide leadership roles in education in Florida.

A constitutional amendment to specify class sizes in basic courses was passed in 2002, and the Voluntary PreK program for four-year-olds was enacted in 2005.

In November 2009 following significant funding cuts, the Citizens for Strong Schools Lawsuit was filed, and amended in 2014. The complaint was based on Article IX of the Florida Constitution requirement that the State of Florida provide a uniform, safe sufficient and high-quality system of free public schools. After a series of legal procedures and appeals, the case now awaits oral arguments before the Florida Supreme Court.



## **Local Control**

Resistance to the provisions in HB 7069, passed by the legislature in 2017 has created a movement by districts to file a new lawsuit. The contention is that the bill violates the constitutional authority of local districts by requiring local districts to share local property tax revenue with privately owned charter schools as well as to close low performing schools or turn them into charters.

## **League Principles for School Choice**

Florida's constitution provides for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high-quality school system as the paramount duty of the state. The League of Women Voters supports the following principles to help ensure that public education can fulfill its duty to Florida's children. The implementation of the law should adhere to these basic principles:

- A uniform system should include the same requirements for educational content, certification, instructional hours and assessment for any school, public or private, that receives public money. Student admissions and dismissal policies should be uniformly applied to public and charter schools.
- Public moneys should not be allocated, directly or indirectly, to private schools or for private school scholarships.
- An efficient system must require that all students have access to appropriate educational opportunities within the public-school system. Direct or indirect funding for public/private partnerships, if allowed, should complement district educational programs, not duplicate them.
- Local school districts must have management oversight responsibility of any school within its district, public or private, that receives public money. Districts must report a school's failure to comply with state regulations and/or contract agreements and ensure that all criteria for staffing and administration, fiscal management including illegal assessment of fees, policy and procedural transparency, and procurement and facilities are met with no conflict of interest among the governing board or staff the same as any public agency. The district should also have the primary authority not only to require corrective action and but also to dissolve contracts when warranted. A charter school must be organized by, and be operated by, a non-profit organization by Florida law. The implementation of this law must be stringently applied.
- Every student should have access to a free, high quality education regardless of race, family income or geographical location. Less expensive alternative schools that do not require the same standards for curriculum and instruction should not be allowed. Provision must be made for appropriate high-quality services to meet the diverse needs of children. Accountability requirements should be the same for all schools funded with public money.

## **Position on Schools Choice**

**Oversight:** The locally elected school board is constitutionally established to provide oversight and direction to the educational system in each district. The school board should have the authority and the responsibility to require fiscal, management and procedural accountability and enforcement of charter terms and conditions. The requirement of local school districts to authorize and oversee a parallel educational organization may require more funding than currently provided in legislation and a clarification of authority regarding enforcement of charter provisions.

**Charter School Purpose:** The purpose of charter schools is to serve unmet needs with a primary focus on low income families, reading, and innovative instructional methods. Local needs are best identified by the local school district as part of its strategic plan. To avoid inefficiency through duplicative programs or to have insufficient funding for either program to be successful, charter schools should serve as a complement to not a competitor of traditional public schools. The following League principles are intended to help ensure that charter schools serve this function.

**Charter School Management:** Since charter schools are public schools, management structures and requirements should be similar. Traditional public schools have Parent Advisory Councils and charters have independent boards which provide input to the school administration. A public charter school should have local representation on the governing board, at least one community resident answerable to school parents and community and not be governed by an entity with no ties or accountability to the community it serves. Both traditional and charter public schools need to have flexibility to develop schedules and curricula. The community is best served if the compensation for instructional personnel is within a maximum and minimum guideline within the district to assure quality of personnel and retention in the classroom.

A public charter school should have local representation on the governing board, at least one community resident answerable to school parents and community, and not be governed by an entity with no ties or accountability to the community it serves. Charter schools should be supervised by district staff with enforcement powers to ensure that they conform to state regulations. These regulations should include fiscal responsibilities and adherence to building code as well as school admissions and dismissal policies and procedures. Public charter schools must have appropriately certified full or part time instructors on staff before applying for Exceptional Student Services funding. Their school admissions and dismissal policies and procedures should be supervised by district staff with enforcement powers to ensure that they conform to state guidelines. Public charter schools must have appropriately certified full or part time instructors on staff before applying for Exceptional Student Services funding. District supervision may require additional funds for oversight.

Education positions follow.

## **LWVFL Education Positions**

### **Education Financing and Equity**

1. Support of a free public-school system for Florida with equality of educational opportunity for all. Emphasis should be on policies and appropriations that give priority to the improvement of academic standards. (1960)
2. Support of the weighted-pupil concept, based on average daily membership, as the unit for distribution of funds. (1971)
3. Support of the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). (1971) This program replaced the original MFP as basis for education financing. It required uniform assessment of property throughout the state.
4. Support reaffirmed for the FEFP as the mechanism for funding public education in Florida, and increased appropriations for education. (1988)
5. Support reaffirmed for previous positions on state funding, but added the following more specific positions:
6. All state-mandated programs should be fully financed by state funding.
7. An adjustment should be made in the equalization formula to compensate for the differing costs of living among districts.
8. Strict statutory criteria should be required for categorical programs, due to concerns about the potential inequity of education funded through categoricals.
9. Vocational-technical programs and other alternative education programs should be sufficiently funded in every school district. (1988)

### **District Education Structure/Organization**

1. District School Boards should be non-partisan and non-salaried. (1970)
2. Each school district should decide locally whether School Board members should be elected districtwide or on another basis. (1999)
3. The office of school trustee should be abolished. (1960)
4. The district school superintendent should be appointed by the district School Board. (1962)
5. There should be statutory requirements that set qualifications for training and experience in administration of public schools for the district superintendent of schools, whether appointed or elected. (1962)

### **State Education Structure and Organization**

1. A state Board of Education should be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate or Legislature. The board should have a membership of no less than

seven nor more than fifteen, appointed for staggered terms. Responsibilities should be to establish policy, to make rules and regulations, to set minimum standards, to propose legislation for educational programs, and to approve the state budget for kindergarten, elementary, and secondary education. (1971)

2. A chief state school officer (commissioner of education) should be appointed by the state Board of Education. The chief school officer should have professional training and experience and should be the administrative officer of the state Board of Education, rather than a voting member of the Board. This officer should head the Department of Education and carry out board decisions and implement policy. (1971)

### **Statewide Standards of Pupil Progression and Graduation**

1. Statewide pupil progression standards should be mandated by the Legislature. These standards should be developed by the Department of Education and met by each local school district. The Legislature should provide adequate financing of programs to ensure that each child has the opportunity to meet those standards.
2. Local School Boards should be required to adopt programs to implement state minimum requirements for pupil progression and set additional standards to provide for the needs of the local community. Teachers and administrators should be responsible for implementing instructional programs to meet pupil progression standards, and parents should have the opportunity to aid in the development of pupil progression standards at all levels.
3. There should be statewide minimum competency standards for receipt of a high school diploma. There should be a policy that successful performance on a state-mandated competency test is a requirement for receipt of a high school diploma. There should be alternatives to written tests for certain exceptional students. (1979)

### **Teacher Professionalism, Certification and Compensation**

1. LWWFL supports measures that encourage excellence in teaching. (1970)
2. LWWFL supports policies that will enhance the role teachers play in their schools. Teachers should, working within the guidelines set by the state Legislature and the school district, have a voice in determining the goals and policies of their school and the most effective way to meet them. To achieve these goals, teachers should have the freedom to exercise their professional judgment as to the best methods to use in their classrooms. In return for increased autonomy, teachers should accept a greater degree of accountability. (1989)
3. Teacher certification standards set by the state should be required of all teachers before they are permitted to teach. In times of teacher shortages, there should be an alternative licensing program that requires candidates to complete an intensive

course in teacher training, that provides appropriate support services, and that guarantees that candidates will be monitored. These same services should be provided to beginning teachers and to those teaching out of field. (1989)

4. There should be state guidelines and time frames for teacher contracts, with local responsibility to determine the criteria and to make final contractual decisions. All teaching contracts should be renewed on a regular basis. (1989)
5. LWVFL supports the concept of a national board for professional teaching standards and Florida teachers should be encouraged to voluntarily seek national certification. Such certification should not replace state licensing/certification but rather provide additional incentive for upgrading professional status.
6. National certification should be available at a teacher level and master (career) level, should be based on scientifically developed assessment procedures, and should be a factor when determining salary. (1989)
7. The contributions of teachers should be recognized through more positive media coverage, more award programs for excellence in teaching, paid sabbatical programs and other monetary bonus programs. Teachers' salaries should be based on a scale that is equivalent to other careers that require a comparable education, on the teacher's level of responsibility, and on the number of years of teaching experience. (1989)

## **School-Based Management**

### Education governance

1. Increased authority at the individual school site, with the transfer of appropriate responsibilities from state and district levels to local schools (school-based management), is an effective form of education governance and should be the public policy of the state of Florida.
2. When an individual school is given more authority and decision-making responsibility for the education of its children, it leads to increased parental and community involvement and commitment, and school personnel feel that they have a greater voice in decisions. Individual schools are more aware of their own problems and resources, and this policy allows them to be more flexible and creative in finding solutions that lead to educational improvement.
3. Each school should have a school-site council composed of representatives of all segments of the school community. There should be balanced representation of all stakeholder groups, with no single group holding the balance of power. The principal should be a member of the council but should not appoint members independently nor serve as chair of the council. Nevertheless, the principal, through leadership and commitment, should be the key to the success of any school-site council.

4. School-site councils should have an advisory role in the decision-making process regarding the school's budget, personnel and instructional program, as well as school improvement planning and implementation, but no responsibility
5. for day-to-day operations. The principal must have final decision making authority. (1996)

The original education reform and accountability legislation (Blueprint 2000) did not mandate that school-site councils (school advisory councils) be given a decision-making role regarding budget, personnel and instructional program. The primary responsibility of these councils is developing and implementing a school improvement plan. The school district and principal have the discretion to give the council additional responsibilities. Giving school-site councils increased responsibility for budget, personnel and instructional program, even though advisory, can significantly improve the level of commitment and ownership that participants desire.

#### Improved student performance

1. The highest priority of the school-site council should be improved quality of education for the school's students and improved student performance. The school-site council should carry out this responsibility by:
  - a. Developing a statement of the school's vision and goals for improving the quality of education for the school.
  - b. Including goals for improved student performance in the school's improvement plan.
  - c. Participating in evaluation and modification of the instructional program and supporting new approaches to teaching/learning in order to improve student performance.
  - d. Leaving the major responsibility for improving student performance to principal and teaching staff but holding them accountable for reaching student performance goals.
2. Individual schools should adopt their own assessment instruments for achieving student performance goals, and they should be held accountable for achieving state goals, meeting state standards, following curriculum frameworks and using statewide assessment measures. (1996)

#### Role of the state in public education

1. The Legislature and the Department of Education (DOE) must ensure that all children in Florida receive an education that meets the highest standards and that adequate and equitable funding is provided to achieve that goal.
2. The state must be responsible for those measures that establish and maintain uniformity and fairness, protect health and safety, and set high standards for education for all children in Florida, including the establishment of statewide goals,

performance standards, curriculum frameworks, assessment systems and standards for graduation that all schools are expected to follow. State government must demand accountability from all school districts.

3. However, if the policy of increased authority at the local level is to be successful, state government (Legislature and DOE) should transfer to school districts and individual schools those areas of responsibility that enable them to take a more active decision-making role in the education of their children and provide more freedom and flexibility in local school operations. (1996)

#### Role of the School Board/ administration in public education

1. The primary role of the School Board/ administration must be the delivery of high-quality education throughout the district, and the provision of adequate and equitable funding and services to all schools.
2. School Boards/administrations should take the lead in school reform and improving student performance, as currently embodied in Blueprint 2000.
  - a. School Boards should actively demonstrate their commitment to the concept of school-based management through school-site councils (sometimes called school advisory councils) and should stress the importance of parental, business and community involvement in the process.
  - b. School Boards should monitor the membership on councils and insist on fair and balanced representation.
  - c. Through participation in the approval of school improvement plans, School Boards should provide leadership, encouragement, and support to empower school-site councils to become active decision-making bodies that are deeply involved in their own school's improvement.
3. School Boards/administrations should be responsible for those tasks that have districtwide fiscal and instructional impact, such as employee salaries and union negotiations, food service and transportation, budget, tax and other fiscal and legal matters, and construction of schools and other facilities. (1996)

#### **School-Site Councils**

1. In order to increase the role and authority of the local school-site council, increased flexibility must be allowed. Each school-site council should be given as much responsibility as possible for decisions related to its school improvement plan and goals for increased student performance, as well as an advisory role in budget, personnel and instructional issues. (1996)

#### **Achieving Improved Student Performance**

If improved student performance is to be achieved through school-based management (school-site councils), the following needs must be met:

1. Adequate funding that provides for small class size, more support staff, increased teacher salaries and improved physical plant facilities.
2. Increased parental participation and involvement through better communication with the public about the goals of school improvement (now known as Blueprint 2000), and a commitment to more decision-making responsibility for school-site councils.
3. More and better training for school-site council members, teachers and principals. (1996)

### **Public School Parental Choice**

1. Parents of students attending public schools in Florida should have the opportunity to choose schools within their district that they believe will meet the diverse learning needs of their children, under a plan that has controlled conditions.

This is the basic conceptual question to which Leagues agreed. Controlled conditions are local school district conditions that might be impacted by parental choice, such as court desegregation orders, school capacity, neighborhood schools, under-selected schools, geographic problems requiring zones, costs of transportation and other factors, and existing choice programs. The local plan must take these issues into consideration and include a method of student assignment.

2. Choice programs such as magnet schools, alternative schools, vocational schools, fundamental schools, public charter schools, advanced placement and dual enrollment programs provide many parents with an opportunity to choose a school that meets the needs of their children.

The examples of choice programs listed here are not meant to be exhaustive. Special choice programs such as these also operate under controlled conditions such as eligibility.

3. School districts should be required by the Legislature to develop a controlled open enrollment plan that increases parental school choice beyond magnet schools and other narrowly focused choice programs and takes into consideration the concerns and unique circumstances of each district.

This requirement forces a school district to recognize and address the needs of students who do not qualify for magnet schools and other special choice programs. Size of county, population and demographic distribution of students are examples of unique circumstances.

Emphasis is added to indicate that the state requirement is for development of a plan, not implementation, which should be a local decision. (See next item.)

4. School districts should not be required by the Legislature to implement a controlled open enrollment plan. This decision should be made at the local level, based on community interest and support.



LWVFL supports local control of many education decisions because those closest to the scene are best able to judge the merits of a particular program.

5. Parents' desires to have their children enrolled in excellent public schools can best be met when sufficient state and district resources, facilities and personnel are provided to ensure that every school is generally able to meet the needs of students attending a regularly assigned school. (1997)

This statement reflects LWVFL's long-standing position in support of increased funding for education.

# Justice in Florida

Support a judicial system that provides a unified court structure, improved provisions for judicial selection and merit retention and equal access to legal services. Support a criminal justice system that emphasizes diversion and deflection, rehabilitation and alternatives to incarceration.

Since its beginning in 1939, the League of Women Voters of Florida has been concerned with justice in Florida. Over the years justice has been studied as part of Constitution Revision, Administration of Justice, and Juvenile Justice.

## **The Courts**

A comprehensive study of Florida government by the League soon after its organization showed that the courts at that time had proliferated, were not centrally administered, financed or coordinated, and that many had serious backlogs of cases to be tried.

In 1960-61, the recommendations of the Florida Judicial Council were studied under the LWVFL Constitution Revision item. The League endorsed the Council's proposals, which included the establishment of a family division of the Circuit Court (with jurisdiction to include divorce, support and juvenile matters), standardized witness fees and the elimination of the fee system in municipal courts whereby court fees funded judges' salaries and court expenditures.

The League began a study of the administration of justice in Florida courts in 1971, building on earlier work as part of Constitution revision. In a special legislative session in November 1971, a revision of Article V of the Florida Constitution was developed for the March 1972 ballot. The League supported the amendment and began a major statewide action campaign using information from League study. The League's slogan "Order in the Courts" was adopted by the governor. The amendment carried by a solid majority.

The new Article V contained many revisions in accord with League positions of simplification, consolidation and a uniform system of courts. These changes included centralized administration of the courts by the state Supreme Court, a state court administrator, use of circuit court administrators, state financing of the courts and major personnel, and reorganization of the state's two-tiered court system.

All trial courts (not including appeals courts) were consolidated into a circuit level. The appeals courts (the Supreme Court and the District Courts of Appeal) remained as they were. Justice of the Peace courts were abolished under this system; municipal courts were phased out by 1977.

The Legislature, in a special session in 1979, proposed a constitutional amendment modifying the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. The League supported the amendment, which passed

in the March 1980 election.

A constitutional amendment passed in 1998 shifts the major personnel costs of Florida's judicial system from the counties to the state, effective July 2004. Other portions of that amendment are described on page 20.

### **The Judiciary**

League study of the judicial system in 1967 resulted in support of a merit selection and retention plan for judges. Judges should not be chosen on the basis of political identification, ability to get votes or in return for campaign contributions.

The 1976 Legislature proposed a constitutional amendment providing merit selection and retention of judges at the appellate level. The League conducted a major action campaign for the amendment, which passed in the November election. The League's slogan was "Amendment 2 — You Be the Judge." Circuit court judges and county court judges were not affected by this amendment.

The Constitution Revision Commission of 1978 proposed extension of merit selection and retention to both circuit and county court judges. The League supported this revision and conducted a statewide action campaign. The revision was defeated by the voters.

In 1992, LWVFL chose extending merit selection and retention to circuit and county judges as a legislative priority. The measure passed the Senate successfully but failure in the House killed the bill.

Since members believed that the League position on the merit selection and retention of judges would be strengthened with the addition of a method of evaluating justices and judges in the merit retention election, the 1993 LWVFL Convention adopted a study on this topic. A position was reached that Florida should have a formal method for evaluating judges for retention election.

(Please see page 8 under Florida Constitution, merit selection and retention of judges, for a further discussion of the issue.)

Currently, judicial vacancies are filled by appointment of the Governor, as directed by the Florida Constitution. The Governor makes these appointments from a list of not fewer than three and not more than six persons nominated by a judicial nominating commission. Each judicial nominating commission is composed of nine members. Five of those members are appointed to the commission at the sole discretion of the Governor. The remaining four commission positions are also appointed by the Governor; however, the Governor must make his or her appointment for each of those four positions from a list of nominees recommended by the Board of Governors of The Florida Bar. The Board of Governors of The Florida Bar recommends three people for each of those positions on the commission, and the Governor must make his or her selection from that list or reject all

three recommendations and request that a new list of three be provided. A bill was filed during the 2011 legislative session that would retain the current membership-selection process but would provide that the governor dismiss all current members of the twenty-six judicial nominating commissions. The bill did not pass in either house.

Early in the 2011 session, the House Speaker proposed legislation to split the state Supreme Court in two and expand the number of justices. Each court would have five members for a total of ten as opposed to the current seven-member court. One branch would handle civil cases and the other would handle criminal cases. There were many critics of the bill who stated that the legislation would undermine the independence of the judiciary and that it was retribution for the Supreme Court striking down three amendments proposed by the 2010 legislature. The bill was altered as it passed through the House; the Supreme Court would remain as a single court, but three justices would be added to the panel and there would be a civil and criminal division, each with five justices. The bill was now a joint resolution and would appear on the 2012 ballot. As it moved to the Senate, the bill was not as well received. While it passed through two committees, it was defeated on the floor of the Senate. However, \$400,000 was provided in the budget for a study of the Supreme Court; the governor later vetoed the expenditure.

### **Equal Access to the Legal System**

In late 1980 the League moved into a new area of the justice portfolio: equal access to the legal system. At that time, LWVFL actively supported reauthorization and appropriations for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). The LSC is the principal source of funds for legal aid programs in the country. Created by the U.S. Congress in 1974, it is a private-membership non-profit corporation that provides assistance for representation in civil (as opposed to criminal) cases.

League action was based on national and state positions that supportive services to low-income persons should include legal services and, further, on the principle of individual liberties established in the United States Constitution. In 1998, the Florida Supreme Court approved an interest on trust accounts (IOTA) program that generates additional revenue for legal aid programs in the state. Fund distributions are recommended by Florida Legal Services and approved by the Florida Bar Foundation. During the 1982 legislative session, the League joined other groups in support of a bill that would have established a Legal Assistance Corporation of Florida; this corporation would have supplemented or supplanted the federal LSC. The bill died in committee.

### **Criminal Justice System**

In 1972, League attention was directed to the studies of many of the issues in the criminal justice process. As part of the study, LWVFL sponsored a two-day conference that included tours through Florida State Prison at Raiford, Florida Correctional Institution at Lowell, and the Reception and Medical Center at Lake Butler.

## **Sentencing**

The League's positions grew out of the awareness that programs designed merely to lock offenders away from the public eye were ineffective. Recidivism rates remain high, violent crimes continue to be committed. Meanwhile, unreformed offenders who are in prison are completing their terms and returning to society. The League emphasizes programs stressing rehabilitation rather than retribution, if for no other reason than the protection of the public. The League strongly supported reform measures in the 1983 legislative session.

The suggested sentencing aids (See pages 52-53, Sentencing, Nos. 6-9.) would seek to establish a broader base from which to determine the proper sentence, helping to fit the sentence to the individual offender. Extra care should be taken to separate first-time or juvenile offenders from offenders who are repeaters.

Factors entering into sentencing decisions are complex and not normally available to the jury. However, in capital cases a recommendation regarding clemency could be helpful to the judge.

The sentencing laws in 1988 led to greater disparity in sentencing. The League continued lobbying efforts in 1993 to reach goals of more uniformity.

The 1993 special session passed a criminal justice bill that took effect in 1994 and made the following changes: repealed awarding basic (unearned) gain time, revised early release mechanisms and restructured sentencing guidelines by providing that sentences will be determined, in part, by using a schedule that ranks the severity of primary offense, additional offenses before the court for sentencing and prior offenses committed by the offender. It repealed most of the minimum mandatory sentences and placed them in the guidelines. The bill also revised the criteria for sentencing habitual felony offenders and provided eligibility for controlled release and required each state attorney to adopt uniform criteria when determining eligibility for habitual-offender sentencing.

The 1995 Legislature completely revamped criminal justice in Florida for both adults and juveniles. The thrust for the adult criminal was more prison beds and longer sentences. No provision was made for more education or rehabilitation. Many references were made to sentencing by the 1995 Legislature, but guidelines were tied to the type and degree of violence of the crime. In the 1996 and 1997 legislative sessions many of the bills that were proposed and those that passed continued to reflect the perspective of the major revisions that were made by the 1995 Legislature.

## **Corrections, Probation and Parole**

Suggestions for alternatives other than prison include halfway houses, probation, suspended sentences, pre-trial intervention, drug rehabilitation programs and detoxification centers.

Small institutions with adequate staff can ensure a more personalized and responsive

program. Location near urban centers could assure that medical, educational and vocational facilities, as well as more job opportunities and public transportation, would be available to the offender. Further, competent correctional personnel may be more likely to be available near an urban setting.

Adequate parole and probation supervision is essential to assuring success of alternatives to incarceration. A supervised transition period will make it more likely that the ex-offender will become self-supporting and socially integrated. It is in the interest of the general public to see that the chances of success for the ex-offender are enhanced. In the 1983 legislative session the League was instrumental in securing passage of an omnibus reform bill (the Correctional Reform Act of 1983), which provides alternatives to incarceration for some non-violent offenders through a program of community control.

### **Bail and Bonds**

The bail system has been employed to assure the appearance of the accused at trial. There is strong evidence, however, that the money bail system is discriminatory and works against the poor. Further, there is some doubt that it actually assures the accused person's appearance at trial. In arriving at their position, League members stressed that alternatives to detention should be used wherever possible, while assuring public safety and continuity in the court process.

Release on recognizance (ROR) is being used more frequently and has been most effective when the screening of those being considered for ROR has been thorough and in depth. Factors such as whether or not the accused is employed, has a family and has roots in the community weigh heavily in deciding who should be released on re- cognizance. Certainly, those who are a danger to society or who have no community or job ties are poor risks for this approach.

Options, such as the 10 percent cash bond, should be available. In this system, a deposit of cash or securities equal to 10 percent of the bond is made to the court instead of to a bonding agency. The deposit, minus a service charge, would be returned if the accused person appears in court.

### **Victimless Crime**

League members agree that moral laws that do not reflect contemporary mores or that cannot be enforced should be carefully reviewed for possible removal from the penal code through legislative action.

### **Judicial Independence Projects — 2001-2007**

Because of a growing concern about political perceptions of sitting judges' views, the League of Women Voters of the United States, with financial assistance from the Open Society Institute, announced that grants were available during 2001 for Leagues to survey judges in their states regarding their concerns about their own sense of independence.

The League of Women Voters of Tallahassee received one of the grants and surveyed 826 sitting judges in Florida about judicial independence. The results were clear that many areas of concern existed and there was a great need to educate the public about the crucial role of the judicial system in a free country. With an additional generous grant from Florida Lawyers Association for the Maintenance of Excellence (FLAME), the Tallahassee League hired the Florida Law Related Education Association Inc. to design a series of programs with exercises about the Constitution, the judiciary and the courts, suitable for use by the public and in our schools.

As the Tallahassee League announced its findings, legislation was passed allowing the governor to control the selection of all panel members of Judicial Nominating Commissions, the group of individuals that selects the names of attorneys submitted to the governor to fill vacancies on the bench.

LWVUS announced another round of grants for 2002, this time to survey judicial candidates before and after the 2002 elections about the conduct of and any problems with the judicial election process. The League of Women Voters of Florida applied for and received one of the 2002 grants and found serious concerns about the amount of campaign contributions being raised and the extent of negative campaign advertising and the impossibility of rebutting it.

LWVFL also received a year 2003 grant to support at least five local Florida Leagues in staging public events around the state focused on the judiciary and the court system, with special attention on issues of controversy, such as judicial campaigns vs. appointments to the bench and the reactions to unpopular decisions.

LWVFL received a third grant from LWVUS in 2004 that enabled the League to enhance its Web site to include voter information about the 2004 state judicial retention elections.

In 2006, the League of Women Voters (US) Education Fund awarded LWVFL a three-year grant to produce a DVD on the independence of the judiciary as a voter education tool for the media and the LWVFL Website. LWVFL continued to publish voter information for the 2006 judicial retention elections.

Justice positions follow.

## **LWVFL Justice Positions**

### **The Courts**

1. There should be uniformity in courts throughout the state. (1942) included in Constitution Yardstick. (1952)
2. There should be simplification and consolidation in courts to eliminate duplication. (1952)

## **The Judiciary**

1. Judges should be appointed on the basis of merit. (1967)
2. There should be provisions in the constitution for the governor to appoint judges from a group of nominees selected by a panel or a commission composed of members of the Bar and lay people. (1967)
3. If judges continue to be elected, their election should be nonpartisan. (1972)
4. A law degree is a necessary legal requirement for holding judicial office. (1972)
5. Judges should be retained in office by means of periodic review through an election in which a judge would run unopposed and solely on his or her record. (1976)
6. Florida should have a formal method of evaluating judges for retention election. (1994)

## **Juries**

1. A 12-member jury should be required for all capital cases; no less than a six-member jury should sit on all other cases.
2. Eighteen- to 20-year-olds should be eligible for jury duty.
3. Fewer professional people should be excused from jury duty.
4. Those who cannot serve as jurors because of temporary inconvenience should be reassigned at a later date.
5. Persons who have served on a jury in the previous few years should be excused upon request.
6. Electronic computerized selection of jurors from voter registration lists, on a random basis, without regard to race or sex, should be used by all courts.
7. Standardized questionnaires for screening prospective jurors should be developed and used.
8. Jury pay should be increased.
9. Public education on jury service should be provided.
10. Specific instructions should be provided to people assigned to jury service. (1973)

## **Grand Juries**

1. The authority of the grand jury should be curtailed. Its power as a secret, autonomous body is too great.
2. The investigative powers of the grand jury should be retained. The grand jury should not have the power to indict.
3. Indictments should be issued by the committing magistrate. They should not be issued by the grand jury.
4. The recorded testimony before grand juries should be available to the affected parties. (1973)

## **Sentencing**

1. There should be greater uniformity in sentencing.
2. A uniform penal code and guidelines for statewide implementation should be



established.

3. The range of prison sentences for a crime should be narrowed.
4. The League endorses a wider range of sentencing alternatives, including shorter prison terms and greater opportunities for use of rehabilitative aspects of the penal code.
5. There should be more halfway houses, separate facilities for first-time offenders, juvenile diversion programs and no limit to the percentage of prisoners who may be involved in work-release programs.
6. A school for judges who sentence criminals would be an effective aid.
7. Judges should receive continuous feedback on the effectiveness of sentences imposed.
8. In deciding sentences, judges should use all possible aids available to make their decisions including probation officers' reports, recommendations of defense and prosecuting attorneys and any judicial precedents.
9. A pre-sentence investigation should be mandatory in all cases in which incarceration for one year or more is possible, or when the defendant is under the age of majority. All information from the pre-sentence investigation should be substantiated and verified.
10. Juries should not make recommendations for sentencing except regarding clemency in capital cases.
11. Authority for reviewing sentences should be delegated to a state sentencing board in order to guarantee equal application of the law throughout the state of Florida. (1973)

### **Corrections, Probation and Parole**

1. Judges should be able to sentence offenders to alternatives other than prison.
2. Correctional institutions should be small facilities near urban areas.
3. Security designation and institutional transfer of offenders should be based on criteria including rehabilitative needs, type of crime, proximity to families, educational potential, and emotional make-up.
4. Testing should be administered by trained personnel who are competent to interpret findings.
5. Qualifications of correctional personnel should be of a high level, and salaries should be sufficient to attract highly qualified people. Correctional personnel should have psycho- logical and attitudinal screening. Pre-service and in-service training should be provided.
6. Educational and vocational pro- grams should be available to every prisoner. These programs should not be mandatory, but incentives such as gain time and wages should be offered. Each prisoner should be able to help design his/her program. Relevance of program to job opportunities should be considered.
7. There should be appeals procedures for prisoners and an ombudsperson outside the system.
8. The corrections department should be under the same agency as the

Department of Parole and Probation.

9. Qualifications of parole and probation staff should be of a high level and caseloads of parole and probation officers should conform to national standards.
10. Prisoners should have a transition period, including work release furloughs, prior to release.
11. Criteria for parole release should be flexible and particular to the individual.
12. All offenders denied parole should be informed in writing of the reason for the denial.
13. The treatment of offenders should be directed toward rehabilitation rather than retribution.
14. Consideration should be given to the appointment of women and members of minority groups to decision-making and administrative positions in the criminal justice system.
15. Alternative solutions to incarceration, both local and statewide, should be developed.
16. The building of additional jail or prison facilities should be discouraged in favor of alternatives to incarceration.
17. Existing jails should conform to national standards.
18. The use of paraprofessionals should be encouraged in correctional facilities and in probation and parole positions. (1974)

### **Bail and Bonds**

1. Alternative methods to the traditional money bail system should be available.
2. Release on recognizance (ROR) should be considered in all bondable cases.
3. When ROR without security is not deemed enough to ensure appearance, non-monetary approaches such as release into the custody of another person or an organization, restriction on activities, or detention during certain hours should be considered.
4. When money bail is used, it should be individualized and set according to the ability to pay. When used, there should be some financial incentive given to the accused, such as a return of the cash deposit when the individual appears for trial. (1975)

### **Women in Prison**

1. There should be equal treatment for women and men in prison. Services and programs should be tailored to individual needs.
2. Support services dealing with childcare and custody should be provided to women in prison.
3. There should be increased use of women correctional officers in all correctional facilities. (1975)

## **Victimless Crime**

1. Certain laws should be repealed altogether. Among them are, for example, blue laws and laws against private sexual acts between consenting adults.
2. Laws against the sale of pornography should be limited to those that prohibit such sales to minors.
3. Other victimless crimes should make the individual perpetrator eligible for remedial help.
4. An example is the Myers Act pertaining to drunkenness.
5. Such a program should be instituted for drug users. To ensure the success of such actions, programs should be adequately financed. (1975)

## *Juvenile Justice in Florida*

Support a juvenile justice system that encourages prevention and diversion and recognizes the special concerns of children and their families.

Delegates to the 1975 League of Women Voters of Florida Convention adopted a new state item on Juvenile Justice in Florida separate from the Justice item, recognizing that elements of both the criminal justice and the social welfare systems are involved in the juvenile justice system, and that it should not be considered only from the criminal justice perspective or the social welfare viewpoint.

Preliminary study of the juvenile justice issue revealed many existing League positions and concerns that are related to the overall problem of delinquency. Juvenile crime is by no means limited to the poor and minorities. However, correlations exist between these problems and school failures, single-parent families, family-related violence (other than the battered child), youth unemployment, gang activity, inadequate medical care — both preventive and remedial and other health and social problems. This correlation with youth crime led to a focus on some of the same problems that have been identified as factors in the perpetuation of the poverty cycle and discrimination.

The juvenile justice system was completely changed in the 1995 Legislature. Juvenile justice was taken out of the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services and made a separate Department of Juvenile Justice. Laws were passed to deal with what DJJ characterized as the state's most serious offenders.

The laws included provisions to:

- Expand the number of beds in residential programs and detention centers.
- Create more intensive residential treatment programs in which juveniles can be kept under 24-hour watch for up to three years.
- Lower from 16 years to 14 years the age at which prosecutors can transfer teens into the adult court system.

- Treat juvenile offenders, regardless of age, as adults if their records include three felonies and three stays in residential programs.
- Hold serious offenders in detention centers if no programs are available for them.
- The new laws also gave juvenile court judges the authority to sanction parents of juveniles, to raise the cap on the amount of restitution parents can be ordered to pay for their children's crimes and to sentence teens who exhibit unruly courtroom behavior.

However, state funding for intervention, treatment and rehabilitation programs for at-risk juveniles and their families has been steadily eroding. This erosion has been precipitated by legislative budget constraints occurring since the creation of DJJ. In 2001, the Florida Supreme Court ordered the formation of a family court to handle cases of domestic violence, divorces, paternity, adoption, and other cases involving family matters, after a panel of lawyers, children's activists and judges (The Family Court Steering Committee) recommended the new system.

Juvenile Justice positions follow.

## **LWVFL Juvenile Justice Positions**

### **Juvenile Justice**

1. The juvenile justice system of Florida should be administered by health and social service agencies and personnel. (1976)
2. In order to promote equal opportunity for education and employment, the League will work to achieve:
  - a. Programs that will prepare every child for either a job or acceptance to an advanced program of studies by the time he or she legally leaves the formal school setting.
  - b. Varied educational experiences.
  - c. School counseling and other supportive services.
4. The disposition hearing that determines a rehabilitative program for the juvenile should be separate and distinct from the adjudicatory or fact-finding hearing, as a safeguard protecting the rights of the juvenile.
5. There should be alternatives to training schools for juveniles who are committed to juvenile justice agencies. (1976)

### **Waiver**

1. The LWVFL believes that in determining the waiver of a juvenile to adult court the following factors must be considered: age of the juvenile, waiver in previous case, prior record, nature of the charge, request of the juvenile.
2. The LWVFL opposes any automatic waiver of juveniles to adult court. (1977)

**Confidentiality**

1. The LWVFL supports confidentiality of juvenile records for all juveniles, both delinquent and dependent, who are brought into the juvenile system. (1977)

**Right to Counsel**

1. The LWVFL supports the position that juveniles suspected of delinquency have the same right to counsel as adults have in the criminal justice system. (1977)

**Runaway, Truant and Ungovernable Juveniles**

1. Runaway, truant, and ungovernable juveniles should be classified as "dependent" and treated apart from those adjudicated delinquent. The acts of running away, truancy or being ungovernable are not criminal actions. Treatment should include professional counseling and programs specifically designed for those juveniles and their parents.
2. The legal rights of runaway, truant and ungovernable juveniles should be protected. There is no League agreement on the method of providing such protection.
3. LWVFL supports:
  - a. Juvenile diversion programs.
  - b. Mandatory presentence investigations (information from investigations should be substantial and verified).
  - c. Family division of the circuit court (with jurisdiction to include divorce, support, and juvenile matters. (1979)

# Social Policy in Florida

Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice, and the health and safety of all persons.

## *Children and Families*

Support measures to meet special concerns of children and families, including countering intrafamily abuse and providing for safe homes, foster care and shelter care.

Since 1920 Leagues have been deeply concerned about the treatment of children nationwide. Impact on Issues (LWVUS) covers the development of social policy positions on a national level. LWVFL has periodically joined coalitions of like-minded Florida organizations working to improve health care, childcare and all other services benefiting children.

### **Foster Care and Shelter Care**

Concerned about the incidence of child abuse and neglect and the resulting need for quality shelter and foster care of dependent children in Florida, LWVFL conducted a one-year study of the dependency system as provided by the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) in 1985-86.

The study included a review of the history of foster and shelter care of dependent children, federal and state legislation, agency rules, financing, personnel, reunification of families and disposition of cases.

HRS separated into two departments in 1997: The Department of Health and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). References to HRS are replaced with DCF in the position statements adopted in June 1986. In 2013, the Florida legislature passed legislation that extends foster care to age 21; previously, children left foster care at age 18. The law also provides for independent living training and provides training and support for foster parents.

### **Intrafamily Abuse**

Delegates to the '85 LWVF Convention adopted by concurrence a position in support of governmental efforts to counter intrafamily abuse.

The Guardian Ad Litem program was established by the Legislature in 1980 and required that a volunteer guardian be appointed for the child in every child abuse and neglect case. LWVFL supported 1982 legislation to provide funds for the program in all 20 judicial circuits. In 1990 the Legislature extended the program to dissolution of marriage cases

but did not provide funding.

In 1996 and 1997, efforts were made to pass legislation slowing the ability of child protection caseworkers to step in in cases of suspected child abuse; LWVFL and other child advocates opposed the bills. Instead, Child Protection staff will receive added instruction, field assessments and career ladder salary enhancements to improve the quality of direct contact casework and ensure higher retention rates for staff with the establishment of a new Competency-based Training and Supervision System funded by the 1997 Legislature. Medical aspects of the Child Protection program are to be under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health.

Welfare reform has increased the potential for domestic violence, but the Florida WAGES program (Work and Gain Economic Self- Sufficiency) has developed several plans, such as transitional services, relocation and confidentiality, to counter that increase.

LWVUS positions are used frequently when lobbying the Florida Legislature on children's issues, welfare reform and quality of life.

### **Welfare Reform**

Sweeping changes to federal welfare programs arrived with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, signed into law by President Clinton in August 1996. Opposed by LWVUS, the act replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program with block grants to states for time-limited family benefits. The block grant, called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, requires work or community service for anyone receiving benefits and a transition to paying jobs as quickly as possible.

The 1996 Florida Legislature worked to design a welfare reform package in anticipation of the federal changes, building upon the experimental Family Transition Programs underway in nine counties. LWVFL urged inclusion of adequate support services and safety net elements in the reforms during that legislative session.

Following the implementation of WAGES (Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency) on October 1, 1996, the League advocated adjustments that would strengthen protection of children. Like previous welfare reform bills, WAGES emphasizes measures that will move individuals from welfare to work, but now adds time limits and sanctions. League agrees with the concept of welfare reform as it relates to elimination of waste, fraud and abuse but believes that reforms should be instituted in such a way that children and vulnerable citizens will not be harmed.

At the May 1997 Convention of the League of Women Voters of Florida, delegates voted to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the WAGES program in order to

determine the effectiveness of strategies to promote self-sufficiency and the adequacy of measures to protect children. Through their observations and comments, local Leagues help to ensure that benefits are provided where they are needed, and that recipients' civil rights are protected. They also assist in promoting community awareness and involvement, an essential component of the reforms.

Leagues have continued to monitor the WAGES program as legislation and regulations change. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 added new federal regulations to the mix. From the beginning, it was recognized that transportation, childcare and education would be major obstacles to moving people from welfare to work. While the welfare rolls have been reduced, a sustainable living wage has not yet been attained by most of those leaving the welfare rolls. Loss of medical coverage for many new workers in part-time or low paying jobs is a further hardship. League and others have argued that the savings from reduced rolls must be re-invested in the program to improve the educational opportunities, to provide adequate transportation and to continue quality, accessible childcare.

By 2001, the WAGES program, per se, was overhauled and the WAGES Board eliminated. The program was transferred to Workforce Florida Inc., the public-private partnership created by the Workforce Innovation Act of 2000. Problems remain in areas of job retention and career advancement, continuing education, childcare, health care and transportation. The Department of Children and Families continues to handle the cash assistance and other economic supports such as food stamps and Medicaid.

### **Child Care**

The League has worked consistently for high standards for childcare including recruitment and screening of childcare providers, training, in-service education, adequate staff-to-child ratios and staff supervision. Other concerns have been adequate space, licensing and registration requirements and frequency of surveillance visits. The cost of childcare is high, but in order for mothers to go to the workplace, they must be assured of safe, quality care for their children. The League joins other child advocates in repeating this message to the Legislature on an annual basis in the face of cost-cutting efforts to weaken standards.

The 1996 Legislature created the Gold Seal Quality Care Award as a way to promote quality childcare programs. Childcare facilities or family childcare homes that provide subsidized childcare and that have met national accrediting standards are eligible for special recognition in a three-tiered quality rating system with Gold Seal being the highest rating.

A waiting list for subsidized childcare for working poor families has existed since 1985. Concerns remain that funds for subsidized childcare for the working poor are insufficient and that the supply of quality childcare will not be sufficient to meet the



growing need.

A 1997 law requires the Department of Children and Families to establish standards for evening and weekend childcare. An even greater need for infant childcare has arisen with the WAGES requirement that mothers return to work when the child is 3 months old. The need for after school care has grown as well. Safe, accessible childcare, with the option of evening and weekend hours, is essential to the success of Florida welfare-to-work programs.

### **Early Intervention for Children at Risk**

The League of Women Voters has long held that early intervention programs make an important difference in the future productivity of the individual and in the ultimate costs to society. Local Leagues identified early intervention as a priority during the 1996 and 1997 legislative sessions and lobbied actively for funding for programs that address prevention of abuse and neglect and that promote early childhood education, teen pregnancy prevention, quality health care, developmental services and family support services. A provision in 1997 legislation related to school system management leaves participation in the Prekindergarten Early Intervention program to the discretion of each school district. LWVFL had lobbied for a statewide policy, believing that it would better serve the needs of children. The bill further states that at least 75 percent of the children projected to be served by the district program shall be economically disadvantaged 4-year-old children of working parents, including migrant children or children whose parents participate in the WAGES program.

The 2001 Legislature reorganized the governance of Florida's education system, resulting in many changes. Workforce Florida Inc. will now administer school readiness funds and the following programs: Partnership for School Readiness, childcare executive partnership, childcare resources and referrals, subsidized childcare, prekindergarten, migrant prekindergarten and Florida First Start. In 2002 other changes became effective, reorganizing and consolidating services for preschool children at risk.

Children's Services Councils were established by 1986 legislation, actively supported by LWVFL. Delegates to the 1986 LWVFL Council approved an action motion urging the Legislature to pass enabling legislation to create a juvenile welfare board in any county that decides by referendum to create a special taxing district for this purpose. These tax funds would be used to establish and/or expand services that would prevent disabilities in children and dysfunction in families. The name of juvenile welfare boards was changed to Children's Services Councils in 1989. Authority was given counties to levy ad valorem taxes for children's services as part of the county tax bill.

### **Health Care and KidCare**

One major issue for League continues to be access to quality health care for children. The 1998 legislative session saw strong emphasis on children's health from the

governor's office. Passage of Florida KidCare and Children's Medical Services Acts provided access for additional children under the age of 19 living in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, with Medicaid outreach, and the Healthy Kids Program as components. Soon after Florida passed the Healthy Kids program, Congress passed the State Child Health Program to provide funding for coverage for uninsured children. The discrepancy between the regulations for the two programs has resulted in Florida losing matching funds, many children left uninsured, and counties bearing costs that counties in no other state are required to bear. MediKids is a Medicaid lookalike program for children under age 5, not eligible for Medicaid. The Healthy Kids Program is for children ages 5-19 who are not Medicaid eligible. Obviously, there are many gaps in the programs, particularly because parents' cycle on and off employment, on and off Medicaid. Major efforts were made in the next legislative sessions, with little success.

The 1999 Legislature enacted the Lawton Chiles Endowment Fund with \$1.7 billion from the state's settlement with tobacco companies set aside to pay for future health care programs for children, the elderly and for cancer research. The children's health insurance program saw a modest increase. However, the KidCare Bill providing presumptive eligibility procedures, year-round enrollment, 12-month continuous eligibility, and eliminating the local match requirements, failed.

In 2000 the local match was essentially frozen. The 2001 Legislature eliminated the local match requirement for the program for one year in order to develop a trust fund to facilitate ongoing community involvement. All other improvements needed to increase enrollment in the KidCare program failed to pass.

#### Quality of life

To improve the quality of life for children and their families and thereby to combat problems of poverty, discrimination, youth crime and related problems, LWVFL reaffirms its support of equal access to education, employment and housing and support of ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and efforts to bring laws into compliance with the goals of the ERA.

In 1997 the League testified before the Constitution Revision Commission urging retention of Florida's Right of Privacy section in the Constitution; it was retained unchanged. The League also strongly supported the strengthening of the Basic Rights section, which received voter approval in 1998.

LWVFL, under the LWVUS position, has strongly supported affirmative action policies. A petition initiative drive to amend the Florida Constitution to forbid affirmative action programs died for lack of signatures.

A renewed campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Florida was activated in

2002. This is a joint effort of local, state and national Leagues as well as other organizations — some organized for this purpose only. Ratification is needed by only three more states for it to become part of the U.S. Constitution.

During the 2003 thru 2007 legislative sessions, the call for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment died for lack of hearings in both the House and Senate. However, in each of these five sessions, the ERA did gain ground in that there were more legislators from both political parties who signed on to each chamber bill. Local Leagues were instrumental in getting their local legislators to co-sponsor the bills introduced each session.

Once again, in 2008, there was resolution in the house and one in the Senate to ratify the proposed amendment to the United States Constitution relating to equal rights for men and women. Surprisingly, the bill was given a hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee; many spoke in favor of the amendment, but time ran out before all could be heard. On an interesting note, the daughter of the Committee Chair was sitting next to him when the vote was taken. The resolution was passed favorably by the committee but did not move further during the session. The companion bill in the House was not heard at all.

The 2009 legislative session brought a new resolution in the House and a companion bill in the Senate. Neither of these bills received a hearing in committee.

Children and Families positions follow.

## **LWVFL Children and Families Positions**

### **Foster Care and Shelter Care**

The Department of Children and Families, as the agency primarily responsible for foster care and shelter care of dependent children in Florida should:

1. Require minimum standards for professional personnel.
2. Provide short-term care.
3. Recruit, screen, train and monitor individuals providing short-term care.
4. License, inspect and monitor facilities for short-term care.
5. Provide for visitation with natural parents or families.
6. Provide family counseling
7. Provide auxiliary services for children, including:
  - a. Individual counseling/mental health therapy.
  - b. Appropriate educational services.
  - c. Medical and dental treatment.
  - d. Day care/Head Start.
  - e. Transportation to services.
8. Provide follow-up services to families. (1986)

## **Foster care**

1. In addition, for foster care services the DCF should:
  - a. Maintain the child in his or her home with the natural parent(s) through support/prevention services when it is in the best interest of the child.
  - b. Provide long-term care.
  - c. Recruit, screen, train and monitor individuals providing long-term care.
  - d. License, inspect and monitor facilities for long-term care.
  - e. Provide for the best placement of children (e.g., permanent commitment, reuniting families, adoption or adoption assistance for children with special needs).
2. Delinquent children should not be placed in foster care facilities with dependent children except under extraordinary circumstances. (1986)

## **Performance agreements\***

1. Meeting the terms of a performance agreement\* is an appropriate requirement for reunification of families.
2. DCF caseworkers, parents and the guardian ad litem, if appointed, should be involved in developing the performance agreement\*. Its terms and participants should be monitored closely by DCF and evaluations should occur at least every six months.
3. Parents/guardians and children should be represented throughout the process, parents by an attorney or responsible adult of their choice and children preferably by a guardian ad litem. (1986)

\* Also referred to as "case plans."

## **Intrafamily Abuse**

LWVFL supports governmental efforts to counter intrafamily abuse. (1985)

Welfare reform

Meeting basic human needs: Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families. (LWVUS 1990)

## **Childcare**

Support programs, services and policies at all levels of government to expand the supply of affordable quality childcare for all who need it. (LWVUS, 1988)

## **Early Intervention for Children at Risk**

Support policies and programs that promote the well-being, development and safety of all children. (LWVUS 1994)

## **Quality of Life**

1. Support equal access to education, employment and housing.
2. Support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and efforts to bring laws into compliance with the goals of the ERA. (LWVUS, 1989)

Please refer to the latest edition of Impact on Issues for further information on LWWUS Social Policy program.

## *Financing and Delivery of Health Care*

Support use of federal, state and local resources to develop programs emphasizing equitable access to high quality comprehensive health care for all and control of costs for the individual.

At the 1991 LWWFL Convention, members adopted a not- recommended study of the public and private mechanisms for delivery and financing of health care in Florida. The scope of the program was to examine the current status of and evaluate public and private alter- natives for the delivery and financing of health care in Florida, including coverage, cost, funding, "rationing," strengths and weaknesses.

The LWWUS Health Care study, adopted at the 1990 LWWUS Convention, reached consensus in April 1993 and announced the position, in brief:

**Promote a health care system for the United States that pro- vides access to a basic level of quality care for all U.S. residents and controls health care costs.**

At its May 1993 LWWFL Convention, delegates changed the previously recommended health care program, which was to continue the state health care study of delivery and finance, and adopted the following program:

**Support of measures to implement Florida health care reform in a manner consistent with LWWUS positions on Health Care Reform.**

In 1993 a LWWFL representative was appointed to serve on two committees of the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA): The Basic Benefits Standards Committee and the CHPA Data Advisory Committee. These committees made recommendations for implementing elements of the Florida Health Care and Insurance Reform Act of 1993. The recommendations would be considered by the AHCA for legislative proposals to the 1994 Florida Legislature.

Also, in 1993, the Florida Department of Insurance revised basic and standard benefit plans and LWWFL communicated the LWWUS position to the Department. Although the final plan designs by the Department were better than previous ones, they were not as good as the ones proposed by the AHCA. Consequently, when Governor Chiles proposed health care reform to the 1994 Legislature, the LWWFL supported the AHCA's basic benefit standard for participants in the Florida Health Security Program. Even though the Agency's proposal did not include all the benefits the League considered essential, it did represent a major step forward.

Also, at issue was who would be eligible to participate in the Florida Health Security Program, a program intended to make affordable health insurance available to poorer Floridians. The League supported an income level of 250 percent of the poverty level for individuals and families to be eligible on a sliding scale premium. The 1994 Legislature did not pass the program. On Jan. 1, 1997, the former Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services separated into the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Health. The Department of Health provides stronger focus and raises public awareness on a variety of health issues as well as overseeing county health departments, children's medical services, environmental health and health planning.

A Florida Patients' Bill of Rights, patterned after the nationally proposed legislation supported by LWVUS, was filed in the 1998 and 1999 legislative sessions. Various controversial sections kept it from being discussed by the full Legislature from 1998 through 2001. A Florida Patients' Bill of Rights and Responsibilities was passed in 2002 but it did not include a patient's right to sue an HMO.

In 1998 Leagues in Florida were actively involved in the Future of Medicare community roundtable discussions co-sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the LWVEF. Results of those forums were reported to the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, and to Congress.

That commission failed to agree on recommendations to Congress and little action was accomplished on the national level. In 2000 Leagues again joined with the Kaiser Family Foundation and LWV(US)EF to conduct community dialogues, "Join the Debate: A Citizen's Initiative for Understanding Health Care Policy Issues." The Patients' Bill of Rights Bill debate in Congress strengthened in 2001.

When the Affordable Care Act was passed by Congress, the immediate reaction to it by Florida's legislature was to put an amendment on the 2010 ballot to nullify the Act in the state. The state of Florida along with several other states sued to have the Act declared unconstitutional.

Leagues continue to monitor the provision of health care in Florida using the LWVUS position. See page 86.

In 2008, the League joined the HealthCHECK coalition (Consumers for Health Care Effectiveness and Cost Knowledge) to support the "Health Care Consumer's Right to Information Act." Its revised requirements for health care providers and facilities in notifying patients of charges for health care services. The bill would make it easier for Floridians to get advance estimates and compare prices when they are deciding where to go for their non-emergency health care needs. The League supported this legislation because the consumer should have as much information as needed to make decisions

regarding health care and surgical procedures. Some highlights of the bill are as follows:

- Requiring disclosure of undiscounted prices for the 150 most common procedures.
- Directing the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to post those prices on the Floridahealthfinder.gov website
- Requiring advance, written good faith estimates for non-emergency hospital care.
- Requiring estimates to be written in language comprehensible to the layperson.
- Requiring facilities to provide uninsured patients with information regarding any discount or charity policies.
- Requiring providers to inform patients covered under Medicare and Medicaid whether their coverage will be accepted as payment in full.
- Directing AHCA to include the range of procedure charges from the highest to the lowest charge rather than only the average charge when determining the information to disclose on the Floridahealthfinder.gov website.

The bill had bipartisan support and was passed unanimously out of committees; it was signed into law by the Governor.

During the 2009 session, LWVFL continued to work with the HealthCHECK coalition on health issues and providing health care to all citizens of Florida.

Two bills passed during the session. One of the bills revamped the MedicaidLow-Income Pool Council and forbade the appointment of lobbyists to the council. The second bill allows for additional types of health facilities to receive assistance from a health facilities authority. Among the additional types are those that provide independent and assisted living, dementia care, hospice services, and related facilities for the elderly.

Many local Leagues in Florida and around the country joined the LWVUS efforts to promote a “public option” in the massive health care legislation working its way through the 2009 Congress.

When the Affordable Care Act was passed by the Congress, the immediate reaction to it by Florida’s legislature was to put an amendment on the 2010 ballot to nullify the Act in the state. The state of Florida along with several other states sued to have the Act declared unconstitutional. While the Affordable Care Act would mandate that people have health insurance, the proposed amendment would allow Florida citizens to go uninsured. The ballot summary was deemed misleading by the Florida Supreme Court and it was stricken from the ballot.

In 2011, the legislature revised the language and again passed the joint resolution; it will appear on the 2012 ballot. Legislation was passed that will place the 3 million Floridians who are on Medicaid into managed care. HMOS and other managed-care networks will bid with the state on managing any number of eleven regions in the state. People would not be shifted into the managed-care plans until 2013.

The legislation sparked some controversy; opponents were concerned about the ability of managed-care plans to serve low-income people who have severe medical needs, including seniors who need long-term care. In order to put this program into effect in Florida, the federal government would have to grant waivers to federal Medicaid laws. This new program is based on an already existing pilot program in five counties; some patient advocates have argued that there are many problems in this program. Two other controversial aspects of the legislation require Medicaid beneficiaries to pay \$10 monthly premiums and to pay \$100 if they go to hospital emergency rooms for non-emergency conditions. The Agency for Health Care Administration said that the latter two ideas were aimed at increasing personal responsibility and stemming unnecessary use of emergency rooms.

More controversy arose when eighteen anti-abortion bills were introduced during the 2011 legislative session. Several of the bills passed, including a proposed constitutional amendment that prohibits public funding of abortions or health benefits coverage that includes coverage of abortion. The amendment also provides that the Florida Constitution may not be interpreted to create broader rights to abortion than those contained in the U.S. Constitution. Another law requires minors seeking a judicial waiver for parental notification of an abortion to get the waiver in the district court rather than a wider-reaching appeals court. The ultrasound bill that had been defeated in previous sessions returned and was passed; the law mandates that any woman seeking an abortion must pay for an ultrasound prior to having the abortion.

Once again, bills that would make it more difficult to obtain an abortion were passed in the 2014 and 2015 sessions. A bill passed into law in 2014 bans an abortion if a doctor determines that a fetus is viable; this law replaces the state's existing ban on third-trimester elective abortions. In the 2015 session, the legislature passed a bill that requires a 24-hour waiting period for a woman seeking to terminate a pregnancy. A lawsuit followed quickly after passage of the law and has quickly been making its way through the courts. Currently, it is in Leon Circuit Court after the Florida Supreme Court upheld a temporary injunction against the law in 2017 and sent the underlying case back to lower court.

During 2016, the legislature passed an omnibus TRAP (Targeted Regulations on Abortion Providers) bill (SB 1722/HB 1411) that lists over 10 medically unnecessary and burdensome government regulations and mandatory reporting to restrict women's access to safe and legal abortion. The bill requires all abortion providers to have admitting privileges or transfer agreements, which are not legislatively required for any other licensed medical provider, nor are they a designation of the quality of a provider. These regulations have nothing to do with protecting women and everything to do with shutting down providers by placing unreasonable requirements on health care centers. Simultaneously, the legislation also blocks all government funding for family planning providers that also provide abortion care.



2017 was the first time in seven years that not one rollback of our reproductive rights was signed into Florida law (despite many being introduced). Coalition partners and grassroots efforts successfully defended against every bill that attempted to restrict women's access to health care.

Prior to the 2013 legislative session, the Governor endorsed the Medicaid expansion contained in the Affordable Care Act. This was a complete turnaround from his stated opposition to the law. The ACA gives states the option to expand their existing Medicaid programs while the federal government pays the full cost of the expansion for the first three years and 90% thereafter. This expansion would bring \$50 million into Florida over the next ten years with the state paying \$3.5 billion over that time period.

The Speaker of the House opposed the expansion stating that it might be something the state could not afford while the Senate produced a bill to utilize the funds. The Senate bill would allow citizens to use the federal funds to purchase private plans. Nearly four million Floridians are uninsured; expanding the Medicaid program would cover a million of the uninsured, and according to the Florida Hospital Association, accepting the federal money would reduce the costs of treating the rest of the uninsured.

The legislature never did come to any agreement and the health care issue was dead for this year.

For states that have taken action, the Medicaid expansion goes into effect in January. If Florida waits until next year to expand the program, it would lose some of the federal money it would otherwise have received. There is no deadline for states to accept or reject the expansion. It took four years for Florida to adopt the original Medicaid program.

In 2013, Republican House leaders stated that they would not accept billions of dollars from the federal government to expand access to health coverage through Medicaid. In other words, they rejected the Affordable Care Act. Legislative leaders offered their own plans, but they failed to pass. Health care was basically ignored during the 2014 session. During the 2015 session, a Senate committee bill was introduced that would extend health care coverage to an estimated 800,000 uninsured, low-income Floridians in households earning less than 138 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) who are not currently eligible under the Medicaid program. To be eligible, an individual must be a U.S. citizen and a Florida resident. The bill was heard and passed in two committees but died on the calendar.

Also, the House adjourned three days before the end of the session, and many bills were automatically killed.

Since 2015, the Legislature has shown no interest in expanding Florida's Medicaid

Program to serve childless adults without disabilities with incomes below 138% of the Federal Poverty Level. Each Session, bills were filed but not considered. In 2018, a consortium of interested nonprofit organizations filed with the Department of State a Citizen's Initiative to collect signatures on a petition to place on the ballot the question of whether the voters wanted an amendment to the Florida Constitution requiring the State to expand Medicaid. Sufficient petitions were collected to require Supreme Court consideration of the measure but not enough signatures were collected for the measure to appear on the ballot for the general election in 2020. Petitions were collected for the 2022 and 2024 elections but it was decided by the campaign sponsor that the 2026 ballot was a more reasonable goal. During the 2025 Session of the Legislature, HB 1205 was passed making it more difficult to collect sufficient signatures for Citizen Initiatives and it will be an uphill climb for a ballot item to expand Medicaid in spite of polling suggesting that the public supports the measure. During all of the campaigns, LWVFL members collected significant numbers of petitions.

Meanwhile, pursuant to the reversal of the *Dobbs* decision by the Federal Supreme Court, the Florida Legislature has passed laws in 2023 and 2024 limiting access to abortion to 15 weeks and 6 weeks of pregnancy, respectively. The 15-week ban was challenged in court and the Florida Supreme Court ruled that the right to privacy in the Florida Constitution does not include the right to an abortion. A citizen's ballot initiative in the 2024 General Election that would not prohibit abortions prior to viability garnered support from 57 percent of voters, not enough to meet the 60 percent threshold required for passage.

Members of the LWVFL have advocated for Florida residents to access health care coverage under the Federal Marketplace working with regional nonprofits providing certified Navigators who assist with insurance enrollment. They voiced support for measures that the Legislature has been willing to approve that increase access to health care including expanding coverage for pregnant women to a full year after the birth of the child and expanding the income eligibility limits of parents so that more children are eligible for coverage under Florida's Kidcare Program. With the support of the Senate President, the 2024 Legislature passed a far-reaching bill to increase access to health care by increasing support for providers practicing in underserved areas and to Medicaid eligible patients. This comprehensive bill increased free health screens and mental health mobile crisis response services, licensed Advanced Birth Centers, and created interstate compacts allowing providers from compact states to practice in Florida. However, no provisions were included to provide health care insurance coverage for the uninsured, allowing them to pay for the services of the increased health care providers.

The language in the LWVFL Program has not allowed LWVFL members to advocate for health care access other than through Medicare expansion. LWVFL members interested in health care subsequently appealed to the LWVFL delegates at the 2025 Convention

to approve a new position statement and update the issues for action. Delegates unanimously approved the new position statement.

Please refer to the latest edition of Impact on Issues and update bulletins from LWWUS for further information on LWWUS Health Care program.

## *Farmworkers*

Support measures to provide safe, adequate living and working conditions for farmworkers.

In December 1974, the League of Women Voters of Florida Education Fund sponsored a conference in Clewiston on farmworkers. The keynote speaker, Philip Lewis of the Florida Senate, said, "This meeting represents society's growing concern for a group of people who historically have been neglected and even excluded... The world is confronted by an unprecedented and long-term food crisis...aggravated by rocketing prices for fertilizer, petroleum and food itself. A gap between the well fed and the underfed is widening and there are more hungry people. Producers face major problems, including higher production costs, competition from foreign countries, shortages, environmental restrictions, the high costs of farmland, a burdensome tax structure and an unpredictable market. And we must keep in mind the difference between the big agri-business and the small farmer." This statement remains valid today.

Agriculture is big business in this state and is of major economic importance to all Floridians. The problems of both the farmworkers, including legal immigrants and undocumented aliens, and the farmer have an impact on the total economic health of our state.

The 1977 LWWFL Convention directed the state board to gather information and increase action in support of farmworkers under the League's national position of promoting social justice by securing equal rights for all, combating discrimination and poverty and working to provide equal access to education, employment and housing. Delegates to the 1979 convention adopted a separate study of the status of farmworkers.

The study began by focusing on existing legislation and enforcement at all levels in the areas of housing, education, child labor, health, field sanitation and working condition as they affect farmworkers and growers.

Positions announced in November 1980 stated that, except for the area of education, existing laws are inadequate and inadequately enforced. A second phase of the study focused on an evaluation of the need for additional legislation. Positions adopted in May

1981 called for equitable procedures for collective bargaining, fair landlord-tenant laws and bonded crew leaders.

In the 1982 legislative session, pesticide regulation was re-enacted with improvements. In the 1983 session of the Legislature, regulations concerning migrant labor camps were improved and extended to cover more farmworkers. In 1984, unemployment laws were modified to provide better coverage for farmworkers.

Farmworker wages, health care and housing and education for farmworker children continue to be major concerns with no easy solution.

### **A Yardstick for Good Law Affecting Employees**

A good law affecting agricultural employers and employees must:

- Be enforceable with adequate appropriations and personnel.
- Take into consideration the seasonality of the work and mobility of the farm- workers.
- Recognize the diversity and scope of agriculture in Florida.
- Make the best possible use of existing local, state and federal agencies to direct agricultural labor toward opportunities for skill enhancement and year- round employment.
- Assure a healthful working and living environment and a decent standard of living for employees.
- Allow the employers a reasonable return on their investments. (1980)

### **LWVFL Positions on Farmworkers**

1. Existing legislation affecting farmworkers is not adequate in the areas of housing; child labor and childcare; health safety, and sanitation; crew leaders; and wages and benefits. (11/80)
2. Laws affecting farmworkers in the area of education are adequate. (11/80)
3. Legislation in all these areas is inadequately enforced due to insufficient funds and lack of personnel. (11/80)
4. The Florida Legislature should provide a mechanism to establish equitable procedures for collective bargaining in the agricultural industry. (5/81)
5. The Florida Landlord-Tenant Act should be extended to cover all farmworkers. (5/81)
6. Crew leaders should be bonded to ensure their legal responsibilities. (5/81)

## *Libraries*

Support full funding of public library systems.

At the 1983 LWVFL Convention local Leagues voted concurrence with the following

position previously adopted by Leagues in Alachua and Broward counties: LWVFL supports the full funding of eligible public library systems provided in Section 257.17 Florida Statutes.

No significant legislative action has occurred on this item to date. However, in 1990 a former state League president was asked to present a paper and to serve on the Florida Governor's Conference on Libraries and Information Services. She subsequently was selected as a delegate to the 1991 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services.

Local Leagues have used this position to support their local libraries.

Late in the 2009 legislative session libraries around the state were informed that all state funding would be cut. This action would also endanger federal funding. This was a stunning blow to libraries, and citizens reacted by emailing and calling their legislators. On the second to the last day of budget negotiations, the funding of up to \$23 million was restored by taking money from the Transportation Trust Fund and the Fund for Cultural and Historical Grants. Unfortunately, in a time of extreme revenue needs, the legislature is not averse to raiding trust funds in order to meet annually recurring expenses.

During the 2010 legislative session, it was not unusual to see a gentleman holding a sign that told us to "Save our Libraries." He is a librarian who gave up most of his vacation time so that he could be at the legislature, speaking to Senators, Representatives, and citizens about the need for library funding. The budget for libraries had been slashed to under \$20 million, a number so low that Florida would no longer be eligible for matching federal funds.

The Florida House wanted to zero out all funding for the State Aid to Public Libraries program but finally accepted a Senate offer to restore the funding to FY2009 levels. The restored funding level made the state eligible for \$8.4 million in matching federal funds. The agreement was made on April 26, just four days before the end of the session.

Again, in 2011, there was much talk of cuts to library funding; some bill proposed zero funding. Finally, at the end of the session the Senate and House budget chairs approved funding libraries at the \$21.3 million they received in 2010.

## **LWVFL Positions on Libraries**

LWVFL supports the full funding of eligible public library systems provided in Section 257.17 Florida Statutes. (1983) This position was changed by a vote of the 2025 Convention delegates to simply read "Support full funding of public library system." as the Florida Statute referenced no longer exists.

# *Immigration*

Support immigration policies that promote reunification of immediate families, meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States, and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. Provision should also be made for qualified persons to enter the United States on student visas. Ensure fair treatment under the law for all persons. In transition to a reformed system, support provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.

An immigration item was adopted at the 1995 LWVF Convention to study the impact of large numbers of immigrants on Florida's resources and services and to determine the state's proper role in meeting the needs of all its residents. In May 1997 LWVFL announced positions indicating that several currently held positions of LWVFL and LWVUS do indeed also apply to legal immigrants. LWVFL also believes that the federal and state governments should bear the brunt of providing extra funds to the cities and counties in Florida that have heavy expenses due to large numbers of immigrants.

## **Background**

Through policies promulgated by the U. S. government, Florida has been the destination of a disproportionate number of immigrants from Cuba and Haiti. The federal government recognized this and instituted programs to assist the affected areas. The programs were directed towards aiding refugees and asylees (individuals offered sanctuary). A good deal of the expense was borne by state and local governments. In the past few years these numbers have been augmented by the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from Central and South America.

Certain areas of Florida were disproportionately impacted. Miami-Dade County bore the brunt, while Broward, Hillsborough, Palm Beach and Osceola counties also absorbed large numbers. Many immigrants scattered into the more rural areas, leaving small communities to try to cope with the accompanying problems. Verifiable statistics on undocumented aliens were non-existent. In the summer of 1996, new national welfare reform legislation was passed, as well as the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.

Among many other provisions, the legislation increased border controls, provided for the development of identification and status documents that could not be forged, made sponsors enforcedly responsible, strictly limited federal benefits of food stamps, Supplementary Security Income (SSI), Medicaid and the like for legal immigrants.

The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and the Agricultural Research Act of 1998 corrected many of the inequities of the original 1996 Act. Food stamp eligibility was restored for

legal immigrant children, senior citizens and people with disabilities who came to the United States before Aug. 22, 1996. States are given the option of providing health coverage to legal immigrant children entering the country after Aug. 22, 1996. Rules are constantly evolving; those that involve funding are often most controversial.

Although the federal government tried to pass immigration laws in 2007, their efforts collapsed, and since then, states have been passing legislation regarding illegal immigration.

In April 2010, Arizona passed the most stringent bill; immigrants would have to carry documents with them at all times; failure to do so would be a criminal offense. Also, police had broad powers to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally. Just days before the law was enacted, a federal judge issued a pre-liminary injunction that blocked the law's most controversial provisions.

Many states, including Florida rushed to get similar legislation enacted. During the 2011 legislative session, the Florida House proposed a bill called the Florida Immigration Enforcement Act. While the House bill authorized law enforcement officers to determine the immigration status of any person under criminal investigation if there is a suspicion that the person is an alien, the Senate bill did not. The most controversial aspect of the bill was the House requirement that every private employer use the federal E-Verify system to verify the employment eligibility of each employee; it also would authorize the filing of complaints with the licensing agency, state attorney or attorney general, and provides for suspension of license for businesses knowingly employing an unauthorized alien. E-Verify allows employers to ensure that they are hiring authorized workers by electronically comparing the identification and authorization information that employees provide with information contained in federal Social Security Administration (SSA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) databases. To participate in E-Verify, the employer must sign a memorandum of understanding that governs the system's operation. After enrolling in E-Verify, employers must still complete the I-9 verification process.

The legislation drew opposition from many groups including Florida businesses, the agricultural industry, and law enforcement officials. The bill was passed in the House but languished in the Senate; it was not brought up until the last week of the session. During the last two weeks of the session, some 2,000 immigrants were present in the Capitol, quietly protesting the legislation. They were in the halls and in the galleries every day.

During the Senate debate, the sponsor of the legislation declared that he could not support the E-verify section of the bill; the bill that passed did not contain this section. Since there was not time for the House to take up the bill again before the session ended, the immigration bill was dead for 2011.

Prior to the 2013 session, the U.S. president adopted a policy aimed at allowing young,

undocumented immigrants the ability to stay in the United States. The program did not give citizenship or permanent-resident status to anyone living illegally in the U.S., but it did grant two-year non-deportation promises to undocumented immigrants who are under 30 years of age and meet certain conditions. This was called a “deferred action” program.

The Florida legislature passed legislation that would have allowed the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to accept, as ‘proof of identity,’ an approved application for ‘deferred action for childhood arrivals’ who are under 30 years of age. This would allow DHSMV to issue a temporary driver license to a person who has been granted the deferred action status and is otherwise qualified. However, the Governor objected to the deferred action policy and vetoed the bill.

A federal court ruling stated that Florida cannot charge out-of-state tuition to the U.S. born (citizens) who are children of undocumented immigrants. Out-of-state tuition usually runs about three times more than in-state tuition. Several bills were filed during the session that would alleviate this situation; however, all died in committee.

While no E-Verify bills were passed into law during the session, the Governor signed an executive order that requires all state agencies to use E-Verify to verify employment eligibility of state employees and contractors. Said contractors must also use E-Verify to verify the employment eligibility of all persons working during the duration of the contract. In May 2014, after much debate, a divided Florida Senate approved a bill that would allow students who live in the country illegally qualify for in-state college tuition rates.

While the Governor supported the legislation, the Senate had killed the bill in several previous sessions.

The bill allows students in the country illegally to pay the same tuition rate as other residents if they have attended a Florida school for at least three years prior to graduation. Currently the in-state tuition rate is one-quarter of what is paid by out-of-state students and those who are in the country illegally. In order to qualify for in-state tuition, the student must have attended a secondary school in Florida for 3 consecutive years immediately preceding graduation from a Florida high school, apply for enrollment in an institution of higher education within 24 months after high school graduation, and submit an official Florida high school transcript as evidence of attendance and graduation.

## **Outlook**

Immigration policies are polarizing reformists nationwide. Bills aimed at undocumented immigrants have been introduced in the legislature as well as bills favorable to documented immigrants. At the 2006 LWVUS convention, delegates adopted



a broad immigration study. Many Florida leagues actively joined this study with speakers' panels, local research, and consensus meetings.

Immigration positions follow.

## **LWVFL Positions on Immigration**

1. The League of Women Voters of Florida believes that the following positions (LWVUS or LWVFL, as indicated) also apply to legal immigrants:
  - a. Support of programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families. (LWVUS)
  - b. Promote a health care system for the United States that provides access to a basic level of quality care for all U.S. residents and controls health care costs. (LWVUS, as applied in Florida)
  - c. Support policies and programs that promote the well-being, development and safety of all children and support violence prevention programs in all communities.
  - d. Support of a free public-school system for Florida with equality of educational opportunity for all, financed primarily by state funds. (LWVFL)
2. The League of Women Voters of Florida believes that the federal government primarily, and the state government secondarily, should be responsible for funding the financial shortfall experienced by communities disproportionately impacted by immigration. (1997)

## ***Gun Violence Prevention***

Support regulations concerning the purchase, ownership, safe storage for unattended guns and use of handguns and long guns that balance as nearly as possible individual constitutional rights with the general interest and welfare of the community.

At the LWVF 1989 Convention, handgun management was a hotly debated topic. During 1988-89, the Broward County and Clearwater/Upper Pinellas County Leagues had asked other local Leagues to concur with the Broward position on handgun management. By Convention, however, the State Board had not received notification of concurrence with the position from enough Leagues to declare that statewide concurrence had indeed been reached. Therefore, handgun control concurrence was placed on the convention agenda as a not-recommended program item. After much discussion delegates voted to concur.

League supported and worked for the passage of the 1990 constitutional amendment to require a three-day waiting period for a handgun purchase. It was overwhelmingly

approved. During the 1991 legislative session, enabling legislation was passed and became law in October 1991.

A state constitutional amendment in 1998 authorized counties to require a criminal background check and a 3- to 5-day waiting period for all firearms sales occurring on property open for public access. This gives counties some control over gun shows. The provision does not apply to holders of concealed weapons permits when purchasing a firearm.

By 2001 10 counties (Broward, Charlotte, Citrus, Hernando, Hills- borough, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Orange and Volusia) had adopted the waiting period, thus closing the so-called "gun show loophole" in those counties. Attempts to make it statewide have failed.

In 2008, the Governor signed legislation that allows gun owners in Florida to possess a firearm in any private motor vehicle in a parking lot and prevents businesses from searching private vehicles of customer or employees.

The 2011 legislative session passed two bills regarding firearms; both were controversial. Both bills were supported by the NRA. The first bill amends the concealed weapons license law to provide that a person who is in compliance with the concealed carry license requirements and limitations may openly carry his or her firearm on public property and, when permissible, on private property. The law does not extend to college campuses and the ban on firearms in K-12 schools is still in effect. It also provides that a person who is licensed to carry a weapon or firearm shall not be prohibited from carrying it in or storing it in a vehicle for lawful purposes. Law enforcement officials testified in opposition to the bill, saying that it would make their jobs more dangerous. The Governor signed the bill.

A second bill titled "Medical privacy concerning firearms" prohibits a licensed health care practitioner or licensed health care facility from entering any information concerning firearm ownership into a patient's health record if said information is not relevant to the patient's medical care or safety, or the safety of others. Under the law, doctors will face sanctions including fines and loss of license if they ask patients about guns in the home unless the patient's safety or health is affected. While the Florida Medical Association did not oppose the bill, lawyers representing members of the Florida chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American College of Physicians asked the Governor to veto the bill. The Governor signed the bill into law, and the three organizations filed a lawsuit and asked for an injunction to block enforcement of the law. Their position is that the First Amendment rights of physicians in Florida have been curtailed. Pediatricians say that they ask parents about guns in the home and how they are stored in order to protect the safety of children; doctors have also discussed gun safety with families where someone is

suffering from mental health problems. The organizations that supported the legislation state that it is an infringement of a citizen's rights to have to tell a physician that he/she owns a gun. While physicians have fought the law in the courts, they have not been successful.

A bill that would have repealed the "Stand Your Ground" law in Florida was defeated by an 11-2 vote in the House Criminal Justice Committee during November 2013 committee weeks. The law, passed in 2005, allows people to use deadly force if they feel their lives are in danger. It also provides immunity from prosecution or civil lawsuits.

Prior to the vote there was a march to the Capitol by protestors, some of who staged a 32-day sit-in outside the Governor's Office. During the 2014 session, six bills that involved gun legislation were heard. An open carry bill as well as a bill allowing certain school employees to carry concealed weapons on school campuses failed while a bill that provides immunity to people who fire a warning shot and allows for expunging court records for those who have had charges dropped in "Stand Your Ground" cases passed into law.

In the 2015 session, a bill to allow persons to carry concealed weapons on all Florida college and university campuses was defeated in the Senate. The legislation was opposed by every public university president in Florida as well as their campus law enforcement agencies. The League actively opposed the bill.

In 2016, a bill to allow permit holders to carry concealed weapons on all Florida public college and university campuses was defeated in the Senate Judiciary Committee. A bill that would have allowed permit holders to openly carry handguns in public was also defeated in the same committee. A bill that would have expanded Florida's Stand Your Ground law was defeated in the House. The League actively opposed these bills.

On June 12, 2016, a gunman killed 49 people and injured 53 with a Sig Sauer MCX semiautomatic weapon at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando. It was then the deadliest shooting in the U.S. In the days following the shooting, the LWVFL formed the Florida Coalition to Prevent Gun Violation. The Coalition has two specific state goals: a ban on all semiautomatic weapons and large capacity magazines, and comprehensive universal background checks. The Coalition is comprised of over 120 nonpartisan groups and organizations that support these goals.

In the 2017 session, proposals that would have allowed concealed weapons permit holders to carry concealed handguns onto public college and university campuses, into airports, and carried openly in public places were defeated. The bills died in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The League actively opposed the proposals. That same session, an expansion to Florida's Stand Your Ground (SYG) law passed. The expansion would place the "burden of proof" in SYG cases on the prosecution, thus requiring prosecutors to prove at a pretrial

hearing that the defendant claiming SYG is not entitled to immunity from prosecution. As with the original SYG law, the League opposed the expansion. A Miami judge since ruled the expansion unconstitutional. Supporters of the expansion have appealed the court's decision.

### **LWVFL Positions on Gun Violence Prevention**

Support regulations concerning the purchase, ownership, safe storage for unattended guns and use of handguns and long guns that balance as nearly as possible individual constitutional rights with the general interest and welfare of the community. (2023)

# Sustainability in Florida

Support governmental action that results in sustainability: Meeting the needs of the present without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Environment, society and the economy must be integrated and balanced to achieve a sustainable Florida.

Delegates to 1999 LWFVFL Convention adopted Sustainability as a Program item. The Convention directed the State Board to appoint a committee to establish sustainability guidelines and evaluate current LWFVFL principles and positions to determine, on or before Council 2000, their relevance to the concept of sustainability. Following the initial report of the Sustainability Committee, if there was a priority issue regarding sustainability that required further study, the following year would be spent reaching consensus or concurrence on that issue. The Sustainability Committee established as sustainability guidelines the key principles of sustainability adopted in 1987 by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development:

- The needs of the future must not be sacrificed to the demands of the present.
- Humanity's economic future is linked to the integrity of natural systems.
- Protecting the environment is impossible unless we improve the economic prospects of the Earth's poorest peoples.

The committee evaluated the Principles of the LWFVUS and the Positions of the LWFVUS and the LWFVFL to determine their relevance to sustainability. Relevant positions were found in the following program items:

**LWFVUS:** Government. International Relations, Natural Resources, Social Policy, Urban Policy

**LWFVFL:** Government, Education, Justice, Social Policy, Resource Management  
Delegates to Council 2000 voted to submit to local Leagues a statement for concurrence. As a result, the State Board announced in January 2001 the following position:

## LWFVFL Positions on Sustainability

1. The League of Women Voters of Florida supports governmental action that results in sustainability: meeting the needs of the present without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
2. Environment, society and the economy must be integrated and balanced to achieve a sustainable Florida.

In 2024, the Florida legislature passed HB 1605 which allowed the erasure of references to climate change from most existing laws. Therefore in 2025, Convention delegates voted to add another issue for action to counteract this law.

# *Energy*

Support state legislation for energy conservation and greater use of renewable sources such as solar energy.

Based on LWVUS positions, the League supports legislation in Florida for energy conservation and greater use of renewable sources such as solar energy. Members are active on the state and local level by encouraging renewable energy targets by local government city and county commissions, starting neighborhood solar cooperatives, encouraging school systems and airports to go solar, and serving on various energy advisory boards, participating in energy fairs and sponsoring meetings to promote public understanding of energy issues. The League supported the Public Service Commission in adoption of goals and plans for utilities to cut energy demands.

In 1992 LWVFL joined the Coalition for an Energy Efficient Florida and supported its agenda, which includes removing utility and consumer disincentives to efficient energy use and providing incentives for energy efficiency, conservation and the use of renewable energy sources (particularly solar energy). In August 1992 LWVFL spoke against a proposed 832-megawatt coal plant to be built near Lake Okeechobee. The League testified before the Public Service Commission in December 1992 in favor of more stringent conservation goals for utilities, strong regulations for renewable energy programs, the inclusion of environmental costs and benefits in evaluating conservation programs and the decoupling of utility profits from sales.

During the 1995-97 biennium, the League took several actions on the energy front utilizing LWVUS positions. LWVFL signed onto four energy principles put forth by the Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation, which enumerated protections for consumers that should be taken into consideration during deregulation of the provision of electricity.

The League continued to work with the Coalition for an Energy Efficient Florida by supporting energy conservation goals through correspondence, faxes and calls to the Public Service Commission (PSC). The League also wrote the governor listing the characteristics that LWVFL wanted to see in persons nominated for the PSC.

The League was also concerned with a consultant's report to the Florida Department of Community Affairs regarding the State Energy Program. Funding for the program was in jeopardy. LWVFL expressed the need for a State Energy Policy that would include LWVUS positions.

In 1996 Florida Power and Light Corp. files an application to retrofit a power plant in Manatee County to use Orimulsion, a fossil fuel from Venezuela that is a blend of tar and

water. After review and study of all project documents to compare the current plant with the proposed retrofitted Orimulsion plant, and considering the local area's carrying capacity, LWVFL wrote the governor and Cabinet to comment on various aspects of the proposal and to express the League's energy positions. It was believed that this was an issue for the state League as there are other ports in Florida where this fuel could enter and use of the new fuel played a part in the state's energy policies. The application was denied; however, FPL appealed the decision to the court, which rejected it on technical grounds. It ruled the governor and Cabinet failed to specify which of the factual finds were rejected, or why, as state law requires.

After a hearing officer denied FPL's permit application in 1998, the application was withdrawn. In 2005 the League renewed its campaign against new fossil fueled power plants in several Florida counties.

Although the 2006 Legislature passed the Florida Energy Act as a means to reduce the state's reliance on fossil fuels, the League was disappointed that grants to develop alternate energy sources were limited to biodiesel, ethanol, and hydrogen and excluded solar power. This act did create an Energy Commission that is charged with recommending future energy policies to the Legislature, including a plan for reducing greenhouse emissions, but it failed to address conservation as a means to reduce energy consumption. And, the League will need to closely monitor the "streamlined" process for building coal-burning and nuclear power plants.

The 2007 Legislature then created an Energy Policy Task Force, increased sales tax exemption for ethanol fuel and biodiesel distribution, and required state buildings to meet certain energy-efficient standards. Again, no plans for solar energy or conservation.

Then in the summer of 2007, the governor held a multi-national summit on climate change. Representatives from the state and local Leagues attended. In the aftermath of the summit, the League set up a Climate Change committee with statewide local League representation that formulated an action plan to educate League members, the public, and elected officials on ways to reduce greenhouse emissions. Energy was one of the most addressed issues of the 2008 legislative session. The Florida Energy Commission addressed both the Senate and House during the interim meetings of January 7. The Commission had seven goals: restructure energy policy governance, increase energy efficiency and conservation efforts, maximize renewable energy resource development, enhance energy related education and research, strengthen energy supply and delivery infrastructure, respond to climate change, and our year issues. The DEP presented the Governor's plan for energy conservation to a Senate committee during the first week of the 2008 session. The League supported the bill in general but wanted to stave off some very bad amendments. Our lobbyist worked closely with representatives of the environmental groups. She spoke to aspects of the bill that caused concern or were unclear. These included citizen participation opportunities in power plant decision making, governance issues by various state agencies, impacts on low-income individuals, and the need to fully evaluate environmental, health and economic impacts on subsidizing

alternatives so that we would move forward positively. The bill would require utilities to use more renewable; this added cost will likely be passed on to consumers as an increase in utility rates. However, the bill also contained perks for the utility companies that did comply with the stricter standards, and that might keep rates lower. Meanwhile, in the House, the bill continued to be a moving target with many amendments and revisions released just the day before a meeting. Finally, the energy bill was passed by both houses, and had the conditional support of most groups. There were many other energy bills filed during the session.

Most died or were rolled into the primary energy bill passed by both houses. In 2016, LWVFL entered the renewable energy debate with renewed vigor with a three-prong approach.

1. Legislative advocacy for pro solar amendments
2. A new partnership with Community Power Network based in Washington DC to initiative a grassroots push for rooftop solar using public information meetings and a free market approach to drive down the cost of solar
3. A push at the local level to encourage local governments to commit to 100 percent renewable energy at a future date, and thus to motivate action plans for cleaner transportation and more renewable clean energy, specifically solar.

In 2016, LWVFL partnered with Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) to work on passage of Amendment 4, which would extend tax exemptions to businesses for solar, and for homeowners. In an extraordinary coalition including all political parties, including the Tea Party, Sierra Club, Christian Coalition, Chamber of Commerce, and several business groups, the amendment passed by 82 percent, almost a record in Florida. The League was able to help get every newspaper in the state to endorse. Then just three months later, another amendment was on the ballot, bankrolled by the Florida utilities to the tune of \$26 million – one of the highest funded amendments ever in Florida. With an appealing name “Rights of Electricity Consumers Regarding Solar Energy Choice”, the amendment was hard fought by the League, and again SACE and several other groups, with the newspapers once again, everyone, saying vote NO on this amendment. It did not receive the requisite amount for passage, coming in at 51% Yes and 49% No (needing 60% for passage).

One other amendment, Floridians for Solar Choice that League members circulated did not get the required number of petitions collected in time, due to interference by the utilities. That amendment would have permitted Power Purchase Agreements, that is, allowing third party groups other than utility to erect and install solar and re sell the power to consumers at a lower price than the utilities. Florida is one of four states that expressly does not allow this. As of September of 2017, League members had helped initiate 21 neighborhood solar cooperatives, and one of the largest programs with partner Community Power Network in the country. Following this work, Florida reported a 110% increase in new residential solar permits for 2016.



In 2025, Convention delegates voted to move the entire “Energy” subsection from Natural Resources in Florida to Sustainability in Florida. While one can view energy as a natural resource, many of the issues for action under “Energy” in the program go beyond the overall meaning of Natural Resources.

# **Natural Resources in Florida**

## *Resource Management*

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the Protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest by recognizing the interrelationship of air quality, energy, land use, waste management, and water resources. Support public policies that provide for cooperative, coordinated planning for and decisions about land use in Florida including methods for resolution of conflicts.

## *Land Use*

Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government.

Landmark legislation was passed in Florida in 1972, the Environmental Land and Water Management Act, which established procedures for designating areas of critical state concern (ACSC) and developments of regional impact (DRI); also passed were a water resources act, a land conservation act, and a state comprehensive planning act. A \$200-million bond issue for the purchase of environmentally endangered and recreational lands was ratified by the voters by a 3 to 1 margin. In 2000 LWVFL wrote in support of the adoption of the Tortugas Ecological Reserve, a marine sanctuary 70 miles off the coast of Key West.

The 2006 Legislature funded the purchase of the state's share of the enormous, environmentally sensitive Babcock Ranch property in southwest Florida as supported by the League. The state retains the water rights too. In November 2006, the League successfully rallied environmental groups and area local Leagues in South and Southwest Florida to withdraw the issue of de-designing the Big Cypress Swamp as an area of critical state concern from consideration at a December Cabinet meeting. The DCA has scheduled this item necessary stakeholders an opportunity for public comment.

### **Preservation 2000**

In 1990 the League supported another landmark act: Preservation 2000. This act bonds \$300 million per year for ten years to buy lands for Florida's future. Because of this program, more than one million acres of land are now protected and managed for conservation purposes.

### **Florida Forever**

A 1998 constitutional amendment, supported by LWVFL, permitted continuation of programs like P-2000 by extending for another decade the constitutional authorization

for the sale of bonds to purchase conservation lands. The successor to P-2000, called Florida Forever, authorized the issuance of \$300 million in bonds in 2000-01 and thereafter, with debt service paid from documentary stamp tax revenues. Limits were placed on the amount of bonds that could be issued in any fiscal year, and new uses were allowed on these purchased lands, such as public roads, recreational facilities, and utility lines and towers. Another provision affected the disposition of conservation lands by requiring a minimum two-thirds vote of the state Cabinet before any lands may be sold. A Florida Forever Trust Fund was created to carry out the provisions of the Florida Forever Program.

The 1998 constitutional amendment also expands the state environmental policy to require adequate provision “for the abatement of air and water pollution” and “for the conservation and protection of natural resources.”

The League supports the Florida Forever program but realizes that care must be taken to ensure that money raised is used primarily to acquire and protect conservation lands and is not diverted to build recreational and other facilities that should be funded from other sources.

Both the 2006 and the 2007 legislatures fully funded the annual \$300 million to Florida Forever to add to the more than two-million acres statewide placed in public ownership under this and its predecessor program, Preservation 2000. This 2007 allocation came in a strained budgeting year.

The League and other supporters of Florida Forever were hopeful that the program would once again receive funding in the 2008 session. A bill was introduced in the Senate that the League supported but we objected to amendments to the bill that would move the program away from its original intent – preserving land and natural resources in Florida. The amendments would widen the uses of Florida Forever funds in ways not necessarily in agreement with the original intent. Other League allies joined in opposing the amendments. Some of the monies would be used for alternative water supply projects and habitat for imperiled species. While the projects sound admirable, it was the Florida Homebuilders Association attempt to get the state to pay for the mitigation costs developers incur when trying to develop in the habitat of imperiled species. Florida Forever already provides for the purchase of land for both water resources and species habitat protection.

The water supply amendments and working waterfronts amendments would further broaden the uses of Florida Forever Funds. Our League lobbyist addressed each of the Senate committees in which the bill was heard, explaining that the bill should not be held hostage by other groups that have other agendas not compatible with the intent of Florida Forever. There was also a good deal of concern about the actual funding. The Speaker of the House was not willing to fund either the Florida Forever program or the Everglades Restoration program; he felt that the programs would still be able to run on

money accumulated over past years. However, the Senate budget called for \$800 million more than the House budget. The budget was approved by both houses, and the Florida Forever program received \$300 million and \$100 million was allocated for Everglades restoration.

The final budget produced by the 2011 legislature provided zero funding for Florida Forever. Spending on conservation lands will only take place if funding is provided by selling off existing protected lands and much of this "surplus land" may be sold with no appraisals. The five Water Management Districts, which protect sensitive lands for water quality and quantity, had their budgets cut by 30%. This is especially troubling for the South Florida Water Management District that oversees the rehabilitation of the Everglades.

Since funding for Florida Forever has become almost non-existent, environmental groups joined and formed the Florida Conservation Coalition; its membership includes former Governor, Bob Graham, and former Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel Reed. The group, including the League of Women Voters of Florida, began a campaign called "The Florida Water and Land Legacy" campaign. A petition drive was started to place a constitutional amendment on the Florida ballot that will dedicate funding for land conservation. If passed, the amendment would guarantee a stable, dedicated funding source for acquiring, restoring and managing critical conservation and recreation lands. It would provide more than \$5 billion over the next decade with no tax increase. One-third of the revenues from the existing documentary stamp tax, paid when real estate is sold, would be dedicated to restore the Everglades, protect drinking water sources, and protecting natural lands and wildlife habitat. At this time, the group has exceeded the required 10% number of signatures, and they have been sent to the Secretary of State; the next step is a review by the Supreme Court to confirm that the measure satisfies all legal requirements for constitutional amendments.

The Florida Forever program used to average \$100 million per year to purchase lands in the state. In 2014, the legislature provided just \$12.5 million in the budget. There have been some years recently when no funds were allocated to Florida Forever.

The League worked to garner enough petitions to get the Land and Water Legacy Amendment on the November 2014 ballot. The amendment passed with a 75% approval rating and took effect on July 1, 2015. Under the amendment, the monies deposited into the Land Acquisition Trust Fund will remain separate from the State's General Revenue Fund. The amendment would provide more than \$5 billion for water and land conservation in Florida over the next ten years and \$10 billion over the 20-year life of the measure, without any tax increase.

Under the amendment, Florida's Land Acquisition Trust Fund would receive a guaranteed 33 percent of net revenues from the existing excise tax on documents. These funds would

be dedicated to support financing or refinancing the acquisition and improvement of:

- Land, water areas, and related property interests and resources for conservation lands including wetlands, forests, and fish and wildlife habitat;
- Lands that protect significant water resources and drinking water sources, including lands protecting the water quality and quantity of rivers, lakes, streams, spring sheds, and lands providing recharge for groundwater and aquifer systems;
- Lands in the Everglades Agricultural Area and the Everglades Protection Area
- Beaches and shores; outdoor recreation lands, including recreational trails, parks, and urban open space; rural landscapes; historic, archaeological, or geologic sites as well as management of lands acquired;
- Restoration of natural systems related to the enhancement of public access and recreational enjoyment; and
- Payment of the debt service on bonds issued pursuant to Article VII, Section 11(e) of the Florida Constitution.

Unfortunately, the legislature had a different interpretation of the amendment.

Legislators propose to channel more than \$230 million to routine expenses that were previously funded through other sources. Much of the money has gone to wages for officials who regulate fish farming, new patrol vehicles for wildlife officers, salaries in the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, funds for law enforcement officers to ticket speeding boaters and other routine expenses.

The first three years following approval of Amendment 1 (2015, 2016 and 2017), the Florida legislature allocated less than four percent of the land acquisition trust fund monies to land acquisition programs Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and Florida Communities Trust.

The matter remains in the courts as of 2017. The lawsuit claims the legislature “misappropriated” and state agencies “misspent” nearly \$308 million of the \$713 million in the 2015-16 fiscal year budget derived from Amendment 1. Plaintiffs include the Florida Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, the St. Johns Riverkeeper and the Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida.

### **Coastal management**

The League supported the establishment of the Florida Coastal Management Program and urged the Florida Congressional delegation to reauthorize the Coastal Zone Management Act and continue federal funds for the coastal management program. The League supported the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, which limits federal expenditures on undeveloped barrier islands, and supported similar legislation limiting state expenditures on undeveloped barrier islands.

In 1986 the League supported the establishment of the coastal building zone and the next year opposed elimination of the 30-mile buffer around Florida’s coast for offshore oil drilling lease sales.

In 1989 LWVFL testified before the President's Task Force on Offshore Oil Drilling requesting a three-year moratorium on oil drilling in the areas south of Latitude 26, where the Everglades and the Florida Keys would be in great danger from an oil spill. In 1993 LWVFL wrote the secretary of the interior and other federal officials in opposition to a proposal to drill for oil on American Indian land in the Everglades. The oil company withdrew its application the following year.

Since 1993 LWVFL has worked with Florida Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) and other organizations in urging the federal and state governments to oppose oil and gas drilling off Florida's coast.

However, pressure to permit offshore natural gas drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico intensified in Congress with the accelerating rise in energy prices in summer 2005. The League encouraged Floridians to submit online petitions and engaged LWVUS in issuing nationwide action alerts to help Florida protect its coasts. The bill was withdrawn. For many years, Florida's elected leaders were united in their opposition to oil and gas drilling off Florida's world-famous coast but in 2006 this was no longer the case. In December 2006, a bipartisan compromise was reached that opened much of the eastern Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas exploration, while providing significant protections for Florida's west coast over the next two decades. The compromise created a 125-mile no-drilling zone off the Florida Panhandle, while the waters off Tampa Bay would be off-limits to drilling for 234 miles. The protections are to last through 2022. During the 2008 session, two bills were written to protect the Florida coastline from oil and gas drilling; both died in committee.

The rise in gas prices prompted surveys in Florida in which it seemed that the majority of Floridians wanted to drill for oil off the coasts; this was a sharp reversal of opinion in earlier surveys. Prior to his leaving office in 2006, the previous governor had paid \$12 million to buy back oil leases granted to an oil company that had been trying, unsuccessfully, to find oil in the Gulf. In 2009, near the end of the session, a bill was introduced that would, again, sell oil leases to companies that wanted to drill in the Gulf. The bill did not gain traction, but a hearing on oil drilling was held in the fall of 2009, and it seems that the issue will be brought up in the session. The LWVFL is opposed to such legislation, and the president of LWVFL issued a lengthy press release stating our opposition.

Preliminary oil exploration was to begin in 2017 with seismic explosions in near-shore Atlantic waters. The LWVFL formally protested this testing as a violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

### **Growth Management**

The League supported the State and Regional Planning Act of 1984, which mandated

that the governor propose a state plan to the Legislature. The League also worked for strong growth management legislation and in 1985 the Florida Legislature passed a growth management bill that strengthened the role of local government comprehensive plans and restricted coastal development.

In 1993 the Environmental Land Management Study Committee III produced a report that resulted in changes to two dozen growth management statutes. The League opposed any weakening of the 1985 law, which had not had time to complete a full cycle.

The League opposed placing development of DRI (development of regional impact) review under local government but supported retaining Regional Planning Councils as well as adequate, timely funding of transportation concurrency. Growth management has been and continues to be a priority issue for the League. In 2001 the governor and the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) proposed sweeping changes to the growth management laws. They claimed that the current legislation has been ineffective in balancing the demands placed on infrastructure, social services, the environment and educational facilities while encouraging the needed economic development vital to the rapidly growing economy. They proposed a lesser role for DCA at the state level and giving more authority to local officials to amend their comprehensive plans without the oversight and approval of the DCA.

The League joined other groups in a Growth Management Coalition to carefully review any proposed legislation that would weaken current laws and to insure public participation in the decision-making process at the local level. The 2000 Legislature established a Growth Management Study Commission, which held hearings throughout the state and brought recommendations to the 2001 legislative session for growth management reform. The Commission's final report contained roughly 80 recommendations, many of which heavily favored development interests, were hastily prepared, or were included without adequate review by public interest groups. Heavy lobbying by Coalition members opposed to these recommendations resulted in little onerous growth management legislation being passed in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004. A closely watched omnibus growth management bill passed as the last order of business for the 2005 legislative session. This bill sets in motion requirements that local governments make major revisions to their comprehensive plans. The major focus of the bill is concurrency of public services and infrastructure with the needs generated by growth — not the protection of natural areas. There is no assurance that the funding of concurrency or even that those concurrency requirements will cover anything but roads in the area of transportation. The League was successful in seeing the removal of a provision prohibiting citizen challenges to a proposed permit. There were some other unwanted provisions introduced during the final deliberations between the House and Senate that need monitoring. Overall, this may be a positive step toward responsible growth management.

The League sent a letter from Convention 2005 requesting that the governor veto HB 759. He signed it into law. This legislation eases requirements that phosphate miners show financial ability to restore mined land. It allows, for at least another five years, the filling of many wetlands without a permit or mitigation of damage throughout the Panhandle. There are about 800,000 acres of these important wetlands in the region, all vulnerable to the bulldozers. The bill also would prevent the state from requiring any control of storm water quantity created by new development.

During the 2007 Legislature, the League opposed a bill that allows several local governments (Pinellas and Broward counties and Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa, and Hialeah) to participate in a pilot program that allows expedited, limited state review of land use changes. It passed but at least affordable housing measures were included. Another bill opposed by the League that became law privatizes toll roads. Among other poorly thought out provisions it clears the way for the Heartland Turnpike.

One aspect of growth management concerns impact fees. Impact fees are fees imposed on a development to alleviate strain the development will place on the surround area, such as burdens the development will create on infrastructure issues. The League supports development that supports its own impact. In trying to stave off an attempt by a proposed citizen initiative, not yet on the ballot, that would require voters to approve any change in a county's comprehensive growth plan, the DCA Secretary presented a "Citizen's Planning Bill of Rights." The bill restricted and added limitations to a local government's ability to make changes to its comprehensive plan as well as requiring community hearings on proposed changes. The League supported many of the Secretary's positions. As things went, the bill finally died before the session ended, with legislators not addressing the concerns of citizens with regard to development. The initiative mentioned earlier was placed on the November 2, 2010 ballot as Florida Comprehensive Land Use Plans, Amendment 4, also known as "Referenda Required for Adoption and Amendment of Local Government Comprehensive Land Use Plans." Initiated as a constitutional amendment to the Florida Constitution, it was defeated.

The League supported and spoke in favor of a bill in the House called the "Vox Populi" or "Voice of the People Act." This bill would have mandated citizen participation in all local government meetings; that is, the governing body of a local government authority would have to provide opportunities for citizens to address issues at official meetings. This would pertain to all issues, not just growth management. This bill also died in committee. The 2009 session brought a bill that effectively gutted concurrency requirements for developments in dense urban areas. The state of Florida was hard hit by the downturn in the economy. There were over 300,000 units of housing standing empty around the state. The legislature deemed that the way to remedy the crisis was to make it easier for developers to build. The bill passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor allows development in dense urban areas without regard to the capability of current roadways to support the additional traffic. The League, along with many other groups, opposed this legislation. A letter was sent to the Governor by the LWVFL, asking him to veto the



legislation, and action alerts were sent to all LWVFL members asking them to contact the Governor's office. The Governor did sign the legislation.

At an October 2009 committee meeting, the DCA Secretary explained to the senators that the bill they passed during the session did not supersede the comprehensive plan already in place in a community, and the relaxing of concurrency rules would not necessarily apply. Unless a community amends its current comprehensive plan, transportation concurrency rules still apply. The first reaction of the committee was to write a new bill that would effectively do away with concurrency in the areas affected by the legislation. That would have to come in the 2010 session.

The onerous 2009 legislation was rejected by the Court as an unfunded mandate on communities. In the 2010 election, Florida citizens voted against the "Hometown Democracy Amendment" that would have required a taxpayer-funded referendum for all changes to local government comprehensive land-use plans.

During the 2011 session, a new bill called the "Community Renewal Act" was passed, and the Growth Management Act passed in 1986 is essentially dead. The plan takes growth management out of the hands of the state and moves it to the local level. State growth management requirements for cities and counties were gutted, developers deregulated, and the bill also made it more difficult for citizens to go to court to block local growth decisions. Homeowners who do not want unacceptable development such as rock mines or landfills next door will have to prove their case. Requirements that developers pay for needed roads and schools no longer exist. Large-scale developments can go ahead with no guarantee that conservation lands will be preserved. The new law essentially eliminates any oversight over the need for new construction. The Department of Community Affairs, which has overseen development in the state, was disbanded in the fall of 2011, and its planners were absorbed into a new Department of Economic Opportunity. The DCA had been in a "legislative limbo" since the 2010 legislature had not re-authorized it.

At least one community in Florida (Yankeetown) filed a lawsuit asking a circuit court judge to declare the new law unconstitutional; their town charter requires referendums on local comprehensive plan land use changes, but the new law prohibits such activity.

Tied very closely to growth management is the need for public transportation.

Funding for transit is a long-term strategic, environmentally sound investment, because Florida cannot build its way out of congestion with roads alone. In the 2008 session a bill that would have established a Florida Transportation Revenue Study Commission to study state, regional and local transportation needs within the state of Florida and develop recommendations for the legislature to meet those needs was heard in just one committee. Several bills that would have created a commuter rail in the central Florida area were floated but did not pass. During the 2009 session, these commuter rail bills were once again debated on the floor of the Senate during the last days of the session but

were defeated.

A bill passed in the 2013 session will restrict mobility plans and fees that many local governments have adopted; developers supported the legislation. According to environmentalists, the bill will restrict local government flexibility regarding mobility plans and mobility fees.

Legislation was also passed that is meant to protect the perimeter of military bases; it allows for the acquisition of buffer lands, including non-conservation type lands in order to prevent the encroachment of inappropriate development adjacent to military bases.

### **Rodman Dam (Kirkpatrick Dam)**

The Rodman Dam was built in the 1970s for the Cross Florida Barge Canal project. That project was never completed, was opposed by the League and others and was finally deauthorized by Congress in 1990. LWVFL supports the dismantling of the Rodman Dam, the draining of the Rodman Reservoir and the restoration of the Ocklawaha River to its natural state. The League testified before the governor and Cabinet in December 1992 on this issue. The governor and Cabinet's recommendation supported League positions; but the 1993 Legislature chose to study the issue further rather than begin restoration. In 1995, the Legislature's study report came out in support of dismantling the Rodman Dam and restoring the Ocklawaha River. Nevertheless, forces that opposed restoration and supported the latest study then rejected the study results and submitted bills to prevent restoration. LWVFL has written letters, testified before the House Natural Resources Committee, and worked with the Alliance to Restore the Ocklawaha River, which is composed of 32 state, national and local organizations, in support of river restoration.

Much opposition to the plan for restoring the river was evidenced in the 1998 Legislature. The dam was renamed the George Kirkpatrick Dam for the state senator who was its champion.

In 2002 management of this restoration project was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service and funding became the issue. The League continues to support efforts to breach the dam and restore this valuable state resource.

During both the 2006 and 2007 legislative sessions, the League mounted line item veto campaigns to eliminate funding in the budget for Putnam County to establish recreational facilities as a means to circumvent restoration. It was announced during the 2008 session that DEP's application to remove the Rodman Dam is complete. However, there is one issue remaining, according to the St Johns River Water Management District. Evidently the Silver River dumps into the Rodman and its waters contain significant amounts of nitrate and phosphorous. The Rodman acts as kidneys, cleaning the effluent coming from the Silver River before it enters the St Johns River. The problem presented was how to clean up the Silver River to avoid this situation occurring. DEP stated that the

river will be restored but the time frame for doing so is unknown. At the time, many studies were going on and the data from those is needed to sustain the decision to remove the dam.

### **Property rights**

A strategically timed press conference on the issue of property rights during LWVFL Legislative Seminar in 1994 was important in insuring that no joint resolution or legislation on the issue become law. LWVFL received two awards, one from the Nature Conservancy and another from 1000 Friends of Florida, for activism on the property rights issues as well as on growth management policies and environmental issues. During the 1995 legislative session, the League worked with a diverse group to produce a balanced property rights bill in an attempt to head off an onerous constitutional amendment. The agreed upon bill provided for compensation for vested property interests only. At the last minute, and with no committee hearings, the bill was amended to include non-vested (speculative) property interests, an idea that the League does not support. This law, known as the Bert J. Harris Law, affects laws and regulations passed after May 11, 1995. Efforts to make the effective date May 12, 1990, failed in the 1998 Session. Under this act property owners have entered hundreds of actions against local governments. The Bert J. Harris Act allow property owners to recover "reasonable investment-backed expectations (RIBE)," not speculative land value. Case in point is right-of-way values estimated for Osceola Parkway eastern extension where ROW acquisition costs differ by \$250 million between a route through undeveloped public conservation land versus speculative development property.

The effect of "RIBE" is to make public taking of private property more expensive compared to expropriating existing public lands for roadways, storm water treatment areas, and other public infrastructure. This is the effect of the Osceola Parkway case mentioned above.

### **Wetlands**

The League has long recognized the importance of wetlands to wildlife habitat, fisheries, water quality, and flood control. In 1981 the League endorsed the Friends of the Everglades petition to restore the Everglades. The League worked for strong legislation to protect our dwindling wetlands and supported passage of the Wetlands Protection Act of 1984. In 1991 the League objected to attempts by the executive branch of the federal government to revise the Federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands. The proposed revisions would have greatly narrowed the definition of a wetland, stripping nearly one-half of the remaining Everglades from federal protection. Public outcry resulted in withdrawal of the proposed revision.

In 1992, the LWVFL joined the Everglades Coalition. The League supports the restoration of the Kissimmee River and the entire Everglades system as much as possible to its original state.

LWVFL endorsed the buffer zone and water preserve concept put forth by the science sub-group of the federal interagency task force studying the issue of Everglades restoration. This general proposal, also endorsed by the Everglades Coalition, would help restore a more natural sheet flow of water from Lake Okeechobee through the east Everglades to Florida Bay. The buffer zone area would also include a number of water preserve areas in old rock mining formations. In support of this proposal, in 1994-1995 LWVFL worked against two proposed major developments in Broward County that would interfere with Everglades restoration: Sunset Lakes/Miramar Rock (a housing development) and Blockbuster Park (a sports and entertainment complex). Sunset Lakes was approved, and the Blockbuster Park proposal was withdrawn.

The majority leadership of Congress in 1994 brought attacks on the Clean Water Act and wetlands. LWVFL sent letters and faxes to federal officials in opposition to the Wetlands Reforms Act of 1995 and associated funding rollbacks that would have gutted protection of hundreds of wetlands across the country. The League also opposed Congress' attempt to cut appropriations for the Environmental Protection Agency. Because of the strong public outcry against lessening environmental controls for protection of water and wetlands, Congress backed away from legislation that would have such a negative impact.

In 1997, in support of our previous endorsement of an Everglades buffer zone, LWVFL wrote letters to federal officials requesting that moneys that had been appropriated in the federal Farm Bill for Everglades Restoration be released to Florida for the purposes of purchasing buffer strip lands. The funds were released.

During the 1998 legislative session, the League, as part of the Everglades Coalition, opposed bad legislation that would have precluded state and federal partner agencies from using federal eminent domain procedures for restoration projects and would have given the Legislature the ability to extensively oversee Everglades restoration. These measures would have raised the cost to taxpayers and seriously jeopardized federal funding. Ultimately, the governor vetoed the bills.

LWVFL approved the concept of the Central and South Florida Restudy, which included restoration of the Everglades and a sustainable future for South Florida. After 16 years of study and concerted effort by the environmental community, the 2000 Legislature approved the most extensive restoration project ever attempted, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP). This is to be an \$8-billion, 20-year effort to restore the entire Everglades water system from the Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee, through south Florida to Florida Bay. This project is to be funded half by the federal government and half by the state with Florida's half divided between state funding and the South Florida Water Management District.

Despite strong opposition from LWVFL, environmentalists, and the general public, the 2003 Legislature passed, and Gov. Jeb Bush signed a bill that eliminated the 2006-time certain date for reduction of phosphorous discharge in the Everglades Agricultural Area. It remains to be seen whether or not this act will jeopardize federal support for Everglades restoration.

The League continues to be an active participant in the Everglades Coalition, which consists of public interest environmental groups committed to the success of this effort. Much of the success of this project depends on the development of Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) systems that hold water injected into wells during the rainy season and pump it back out during periods of drought or high usage. At the LWVFL convention in 2001, League delegates voted to monitor the permitting and development of ASR wells. This is consistent with our national position on protection of ground water and aquifers.

The League and its allies in the environment community savored a big victory in the 2006 legislative session with an Environmental Resource Permitting bill, albeit with imperfections, that makes the Florida Panhandle subject to essentially the same storm water and wetlands permitting that the rest of the state has had for 10 years. The Northwest Florida Water Management District (16 counties) finally has the authority to issue permits to control flooding and storm water runoff.

In the 2007 session, major watershed restoration legislation passed, with funding, that covers the Everglades (Lake Okeechobee and its tributaries) and the Caloosahatchee, St. Johns and St. Lucie rivers. The League also helped to defeat various anti-wetlands preservation bills to forestall coastal flooding and flora and fauna devastation.

What began as a very controversial piece of legislation early in the 2013 session ended up with all sides satisfied with the final bill. Early on, environmental groups opposed a bill amending the Everglades Forever Act. However, after much discussion among all concerned groups, including sugar farmers, the South Florida Water Management District, and Florida Environmental groups, a bill was produced that amends the Act to provide a legislative finding that implementation of best management practices funded by the owners and users of land in the Everglades Agricultural Area effectively reduces nutrients in waters flowing into the Everglades Protection Area. It also updates the definition of "Long Term Plan" to include the South Florida Water Management District's water quality plan; the district must also determine if their projects and improvements achieve the water quality based effluent limits established in permits and orders authorizing the operation of those facilities. The legislation also requires a payment of a \$25 per acre agricultural privilege tax on property classified as agricultural within the Everglades Agricultural Area between November 2014 and November 2026, \$20 per acre for tax notices mailed in November 2017 through 2029, \$15 per acre for tax notices mailed in November 2030 through 2035, and \$10 per acre for tax notices mailed in November 2036 and thereafter. Originally, the tax rate was slated to drop to \$10 in 2017.

Proceeds from the tax are to be used for design, construction, and implementation of the Long-Term Plan. Finally, beginning in the 2013-2014 fiscal year, and each year thereafter through 2024, the sum of \$12 million in recurring general revenue funds and \$10 million in recurring funds from the Water Management Trust Fund is appropriated to the Department of Environmental Protection for the Restoration Strategies Regional Water Quality Plan.

Florida Legislature enacted an Everglades bill in 2010 to convert 14,000 to 24,000 acres of state-owned land to water storage south of Lake Okeechobee. This reservoir will help but not eliminate excess discharges to St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers, which has disrupted the ecology of the rivers and lagoons. If reservoir water can be treated to acceptable nutrient levels, it may be discharged to the Everglades and/or Florida Bay to help restore historic southward freshwater flows.

Land use positions follow.

### **LWVFL Land Use Positions**

1. State government should have an overall planning function with limited control. (1975)
2. All land use decisions should be made by the lowest level of government capable of such a decision. State criteria and review as well as coordination between local governments are essential. The appropriate level of government should require environmental, social and economic impact statements on major public and private developments. (1975)
3. The state should provide financial aid for research and technical assistance. If necessary, the state should authorize innovative land use planning and regulatory techniques. The state should not compensate localities for revenue loss from state override of local land use decisions. (1975)
4. Provision should be made for an appeals board to arbitrate conflicts between governmental bodies and between citizens and governmental bodies. (1975)
5. Existing sub-state regional planning councils should be strengthened; however, they should not have veto, regulatory or taxation powers. (1975)
6. When local governments do not fulfill their responsibilities, a regional or state mechanism should come into operation to make the necessary decisions. (1975) Court determination is the fairest method of settling grievances on property-rights matters between owners and governments, as opposed to the use of an administrative agency. (1976)
7. When government action causes a loss of value to developed or homestead property, the degree of that loss should be determined judicially. (1976)
8. Government should not compensate a landowner for loss of value due to regulations on
9. land held for anticipated capital gains. (1976)
10. Tax assessment valuation should be one of the standards for judging loss of value. (1976)

11. As Florida's population and development continues to grow exponentially, pressure on conservation and preservation land increases significantly, acquiring land for conservation and preservation must remain a high priority.
12. Support the preparation and implementation of a new state growth management plan that addresses current needs. (2021)
13. Support the implementation of the Water and Land Legacy Amendment consistent with the intent of the adopted language. (2021)
14. Take steps to ensure that land uses are exemplary of environmental justice. (2021)

## *Florida Freshwater Resources*

Support public policies that promote conservation of freshwater and its availability for environmental, public supply, agricultural, industrial and mining uses on a priority basis (LWVFL 1994)

The 1993 LWVFL Convention adopted a program to study freshwater resources in Florida. The background report of the study became LWVFL Publication 2154, A Study of Freshwater Resources in Florida. The positions below were adopted in June 1994 as a result of the study.

The 1998 Legislature passed a so-called "local sources first" water bill establishing a state water policy that local sources of water (ground, surface, reuse, conservation, desalination, etc.) should be used first before seeking to transport water across watersheds or county borders. LWVF has supported and worked for such legislation. In 2001-02 LWVFL began monitoring Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) systems. Because of Florida's rapid growth, water supply has become a critical issue, and political pressures are increasing to inject partially treated and untreated water into wells during the rainy season and to extract it during the dry season or when drought conditions occur. The League supports stringent controls to protect the quality of current and potential drinking water supplies (LWVUS), and this technology should be monitored for possible contamination of our aquifers.

The 2004 Legislature began work on a comprehensive approach to water planning that would continue through the next session. With strong input and opposition from the League, potentially damaging legislation on water reservations and certain recommendations of the Council of 100, particularly inter-district transfers of water, failed to pass.

The 2005 Legislature passed a major water resource bill that addresses water pollution, water supply and water concurrency. It includes funding for alternative water supply planning projects, local water supply planning and water quality controls. The funding, a

League concern, is a beginning and comes from within this bill and from the omnibus growth management bill. Conservation measures are not included in this Water Protection and Sustainability Program.

The 2007 Legislature took action to protect surface water in the Northwest Florida and South Florida water management districts with new regulations of peat mining that the League heartily supported.

The League earlier fought the Governor and legislature on dumping untreated water into our aquifers. By 2008, Florida was in a severe drought situation, and the League was watching for bills that would allow this practice. A bill relating to water pollution control was passed during the session. The League did not take a position on the bill, but some of our environmental allies feared that the bill would be used to avoid implementation of the Clean Water Act. Another bill that would have required DEP to identify sources of water pollution which contaminate the water and prohibit beach swimming passed through several committees but did not make it to the floor. While several other "water" bills were proposed, none made it out of committee.

In 2010, the Florida legislature passed and the Governor signed into law, a massive bill that addressed water supply policy, the general powers and duties of water management district governing boards, wastewater utilities, reuse utilities and the role of the DEP in the regional water supply planning process.

The bill included the requirement that the 2.7 million septic tanks in the state be inspected every five years in order to protect springs and groundwater from nitrogen contamination which promotes the growth of aquatic weeds and algae. Bills were filed in the 2011 legislative session to repeal the septic tank inspection requirement because many rural property owners complained about the expense. The chair of the Senate Committee on Environmental Preservation and Conservation would not consider any bill that repealed the inspection requirement without providing inspections in counties with "first-magnitude" springs. Florida has more than 700 springs; thirty-three are first-magnitude and produce an outflow of more than 64 million gallons of water per day. None of these bills was passed, and the law went into effect in July 2011. However, language in the budget requires the Florida Department of Health to get approval from the Legislative Budget Commission before beginning inspections.

A dispute between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the United States Environmental Protection Agency is ongoing. It concerns the numeric nutrient water quality standards for lakes and flowing waters in Florida. According to the EPA, a 2008 Florida Department of Environmental Protection report assessing water quality for Florida revealed that approximately 1,000 miles of rivers and streams, 350,000 acres of lakes and 900 square miles of estuaries are not meeting the state's water quality standards because of excess nutrients. These represent approximately 16 percent of



Florida's assessed river and stream miles, 36 percent of assessed lake acres and 25 percent of assessed estuary square miles. The actual number of miles and acres of waters impaired for nutrients is likely higher, as there are waters that have not yet been assessed. Five environmental groups sued the EPA for not enforcing the Clean Water Act in Florida. In August 2011, a federal appeals court ruled that the standards be enforced. DEP is trying to work out an agreement with EPA that will allow for lower standards for some waters like canals.

In the 2014 legislative session, a quite comprehensive springs protection bill was filed in the Senate. While it was heard in committee in the Senate and passed unanimously, a companion bill in the House was never heard. The bill addressed many issues including preserving water resources and preventing runoff and nutrient pollution. We were assured that a bill would reappear in the 2015 session.

In 2015, \$167 million was provided for restoration of the Indian River Lagoon, Lake Okeechobee, and the Everglades. The springs were allotted \$30 million. A springs protection bill was introduced by a coalition of senators; it would have provided \$360 million in recurring funds to address the decline of the state's network of freshwater springs. However, the bill was never heard in the House and, once again, it died. In a year with three special sessions, it was inevitable that another springs bill would appear – SB552, introduced by Senator Dean. A Senate committee unanimously approved the bill which is considered a compromise between the agriculture industry's need for water and environmentalists' desire to restore the degraded springs in Florida. While the bill made some progress in establishing new standards, it does not do enough to restore natural springs and aquifers. The bill would require the Department of Environmental Protection to establish guidelines by July 1, 2017 as to the amount of water that can be withdrawn from Florida springs that are not protected at this time, along with other requirements such as developing remedies for septic tanks that are polluting lakes, springs, and waterways. However, there is some concern since DEP has failed to enforce existing laws pertaining to polluting of springs. Whether or not the bill can be strengthened will be determined in the 2016 session.

League of Women Voters of Florida in 2015 requested Department of Environmental Protection and all water management districts to monitor aquifer potentiometric levels throughout the state and to set minimum levels for potentiometric levels. This request originated at the LWVFL 2015 convention. FDEP replied it would not set minimum levels for the drinking water source for 90 percent of Floridians.

Water Policy positions follow.

### **LWVFL Water Policy Positions**

1. There should be a state water policy covering basic issues. There should be regional policies based on regional conditions.

2. Consumptive use permits should be a responsibility of the Water Management Districts.
3. Consumptive use permit fees should reflect the true cost of the permit application, monitoring and enforcement process.
4. Consumptive use permit holders should be required to reuse water whenever feasible.
5. Meters should be required of all consumptive use permit holders who use 100,000 gallons of water or more per day.
6. There should be a priority order among interests competing for water. The environment and public supply should be first in priority, followed by agriculture, industry and mining, in that order.
7. Factors to be considered in allocating water among competing interests are ranked as follows: first – environmental benefit; second – reasonable beneficial use; third – economic benefit. Prior use should not be a consideration.
8. There should be special tax incentives for wetland areas left undeveloped, with provisions for recapture of taxes if these areas are developed later.
9. In water use caution areas, for the purpose of preserving the water supply, the permit authority should be able to restrict and/ or deny permits.
10. Development should be prohibited on functioning wetlands. However, mitigation should be required, preferably on site, if development on functioning wetlands is approved.
11. Preferred mitigation strategies are enhancement of functioning wetlands and restoration of non- functioning or poorly functioning wetlands. LWVFL does not support creation of wetlands on land not functioning as wetlands.
12. When mitigation is used, the following measures should be taken to ensure its long-term success:
  - a. Develop a scientifically sound mitigation plan.
  - b. Prepare a specific plan for long-range monitoring to assure success.
  - c. Require bonding or other financial vehicles to provide sufficient funds for completion and perpetual maintenance.
  - d. Require scientifically demonstrated success of the project before credits are issued by a mitigation bank.
  - e. Establish enforcement measures including meaningful fines for project non-compliance.
  - f. Require ratios of mitigated wetland to lost wetland that best reproduce the function and values of the damaged or destroyed wetland. (1994)
13. Minimum aquifer levels should be established for Florida's drinking water aquifers. These levels should be required by Department of Environmental Protection and implemented in each water management district. Minimum flows and minimum levels are set for surface waters and springs but not for aquifers (except limited areas for saltwater intrusion). Depletion of drinking water levels is first indicator for drinking water shortages, and these minimum level standards will trigger corrective action. Criterion for minimum flows and levels in Florida Statute

373.042(1)(b) is "The minimum water level is the level of groundwater in an aquifer and the level of surface water at which further withdrawals would be significantly harmful to the water resources of the area."

## *Florida Coastal Management (Beaches)*

Support intergovernmental stewardship of and fiscal responsibility for the Florida coast, under the management of the state, while recognizing the dominance of nature and the role of the sand transport system (LWV 1988)

Aware of the change's development has made on Florida's coast since World War II and the potential for further alterations in the natural creation and destruction of the coastal regions, the League of Women Voters of Florida focused its attention on Coastal Issues in 1987-88. The League spent a year studying the fiscal, governmental and environmental impacts of Florida's policies as they relate to beach erosion, including prevention, re-nourishment and retreat; establishment of an economic base to pay for managing Florida's beaches; and private citizens' rights vs. government's right to regulate.

### **Beach Erosion**

1. The League overwhelmingly prefers the expenditure of public or private funds to purchase land or restore the natural dune systems rather than expenditures for coastal armoring to prevent erosion. In the event of major storm damage, no property owner should be allowed to rebuild seaward of the coastal construction control line.

However, because coastal regulations restrict construction on coastal property:

2. The public should compensate the owner for some loss of economic value. That compensation could either be through the transfer of development rights or tax incentives on the remaining property. League members do not believe cash compensation is appropriate.

The League adamantly opposes artificial methods such as seawalls, breakwaters, groins and jetties that obstruct the natural sand drift, while recognizing that the dredging of inlets for recreational, commercial and military purposes is necessary. However, when that dredging takes place, the use of sand bypasses would lessen the impact of that dredging on coastlines down current.

### **Beach Access**

The League believes strongly that the state should provide for public access in both developed and undeveloped shore-line areas at reasonable intervals. In the undeveloped areas, that access should be provided in a manner that protects the coastal system;

therefore, a variety of access methods are appropriate.

Beach access points or parcels where intense use is anticipated should have parking and support facilities. Seashore parks would best protect an undeveloped area if most of the park is retained in its natural state. Large undeveloped tracts may not be appropriate for public use and should be left pristine.

As much as possible the state should take measures to extend the ownership of sovereign lands on behalf of its citizens. Two acceptable methods are extending sovereign lands to include dry sand areas adjacent to the beaches and extending public ownership to include privately owned areas used continuously by the public for recreational purposes over a period of years.

### **Fiscal Policy**

Because Florida's beaches are one of its most valuable resources, government should pay to manage and protect them.

Public funds should not be used to protect private interests through beach restoration or coastal armoring, nor for any expenditure for coastal armoring on public lands.

Beach restoration and re-nourishment projects on publicly owned lands and the purchase of eroded coastal lands are wise investments of public dollars. In addition, purchase of land to provide beach access points, beach access parking and passive parks, and to compensate for dry sand areas should be paid for by the public.

Because the benefits of Florida are beautiful beaches are shared by residents throughout the state:

1. The source of financing should be broad based. A combination of federal and state funds in conjunction with local taxes, special districts and tourist development taxes should pay for managing and protecting the coast.
2. Historically, the League has supported user fees and does so for beaches as well, with some reservation. User fees must be applied discriminately. The beaches belong to the state of Florida; access should be provided, and any user fees limited to the cost to deliver services enjoyed by the payer.
3. The state should assume the primary fiscal responsibility for coastal management.

### **Governance**

While federal laws set national coastal policy and goals and local government is closest and presumably most responsive to its citizens:

1. The state should have the final responsibility in directing coastal policy for Florida's beaches. All levels of government need to coordinate their actions and have consistent goals and policies in order to be effective and efficient.
2. Wise coastal management policies recognize the natural shift of the coastline.

# *Environmental Protection and Pollution Control*

Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment. (LWVUS)

## **Air Quality**

Florida has been a leader in the preservation of air quality by enacting stringent legislation to protect the health and welfare of the public. However, economic problems and energy needs have brought about some changes in those standards. The League has appeared before the state Environmental Regulation Commission opposing any further relaxation of state emission standards for power plants.

The League has helped to publicize the increasing problem of acid rain attributable to auto emissions and power plants nationally and in Florida.

LWVFL will continue to emphasize the LWVUS positions. In 1988 the League supported reinstitution of auto inspections in six counties that did not attain federal air quality standards. LWVUS is a member of the Clean Air Coalition.

## **Waste Management**

During the 1980 legislative session LWVFL supported passage of a comprehensive Hazardous Waste Control Act, which provides a cradle-to-grave approach to hazardous waste management. Up to that time Florida was the only state in the southeast with no laws governing hazardous waste.

League supported passage of a comprehensive state mining and reclamation act in the 1981 session of the Legislature. The League believes that current laws are not stringent enough to ensure that mining wastes (particularly from phosphate) are managed to protect the ground and surface water and to ensure that mined lands are reclaimed and restored as closely as possible to their natural state. League will continue to support the passage of bills to strengthen laws on these issues.

Passage of a bill to require deposits on all throwaway soft drink and beer containers has been a League priority since 1985. The League continues to support strong container deposit requirements.

In January 1991 the LWVUS adopted positions on solid waste and recycling in response to reauthorization of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) being considered by Congress. At the state level, the League supports those positions. In particular, LWVFL supports requiring increased recycled content in newspaper and packaging to spur markets for recycled products and to reduce the amount of waste produced. LWVFL also supports a temporary moratorium on new or expanded solid waste incinerators until recycling and source reduction programs are well established. The League believes that if incinerators are put in an area before recycling programs,

incineration becomes a disincentive to recycling.

The League supports toxics-use-reduction standards for industry and community right-to-know legislation on toxic and hazardous chemicals.

### **Water Quality**

LWVFL and local Leagues have been actively involved in the water quality management programs mandated by Section 208 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act since 1972. The League actively supported passage of the Water Quality Assurance Act of 1983.

LWVFL lobbied several years for strong storm water runoff regulations. League supported the storm water management legislation passed in 1989.

The League supported the Surface Water Improvement and Management Trust Fund (SWIM, 1987), which is intended to clean up Florida's major polluted water bodies. In 1988 LWVFL supported the Bluebelt Amendment to the Florida Constitution, providing for the possibility of lower assessment for land producing high water recharge to Florida's aquifers. LWVFL works on all levels to protect Florida's ground and surface waters from pollution and depletion.

Legislation passed during the 2013 session directs the Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services to develop an agriculture water supply plan with a 20-year planning horizon and requires water management districts to consider future water supply demands projected by DACS as "best available data." This bill sets the stage for granting new water rights to agricultural users during periods of drought and promotes irrigation over other uses during water shortages. Major environmental groups in Florida expressed concerns about the bill.

The majority leadership of Congress in 1994 made attacks on the Clean Water Act. LWVFL wrote letters to federal officials throughout 1995 expressing the need to keep the Clean Water Act intact because of various health protections it provided to the citizenry as a whole. Because of the strong public outcry against lessening environmental controls that protect water and wetlands, Congress backed away from legislation that would have such a negative impact.

In recognition of the important role that water management districts play in managing both our water resources and our land resources, local Leagues have organized regional groups based on water management districts.

The St. Johns River Water Management District Coalition and Northwest Florida Water Management District Coalition deserve special recognition in this regard.

Three constitutional amendments regarding funding for Everglades clean up appeared

for approval on the ballot in 1996. The first would have assessed a penny per pound on raw sugar produced in the Everglades Agricultural Area; the second required polluters to pay for pollution cleanup; the third created a trust fund for clean up money. Based on its position that, "No tax sources or revenue should be specified, limited, exempted, or prohibited in the Constitution," the League opposed these constitutional amendments. Voters chose to reject the first amendment but passed the second and third. While the League has many strong environmental positions and supports Everglades restoration, we upheld our constitutional position that such tax issues should not be a part of a state Constitution.

Because of the media coverage given to the battle between environmentalists and the sugar industry during the campaign, LWVFL wrote the governor expressing displeasure with the conduct of South Florida Water Management District Board members. Subsequently, policies to guide the districts in these situations were instituted.

For a full statement of LWVUS Natural Resources positions see the latest edition of Impact on Issues.

## *Public Participation*

Promote public understanding and participation in decision making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources. (LWVUS)

The League has worked for many years to educate the public of the need to participate in decision-making to preserve our natural resources.

For example, the League held five workshops throughout Florida in support of a bottle bill in 1988 and published "Mandatory Deposit — A Florida Impact Analysis."

In 1992, LWVFL Education Fund, Citizens to Preserve Florida, Global Warming Education Project and Florida State University presented a symposium entitled "Global Warming Leadership Forum: Public Policy and the Greenhouse Effect" in Tallahassee. In the late 1990s, League cooperated with other groups to oppose legislation proposed in the Florida Legislature designed to limit severely the public's ability to challenge rulemaking by public agencies as well as agency rules. The legislation did not pass.

In 2003 and in cooperation with Creative Pursuits Inc. of Tallahassee, the League received a grant from the Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation to conduct a series of workshops utilizing a media tool kit for use by local Leagues and other public interest groups. The purposes of the project are to increase media relations effectiveness and to build greater public awareness and understanding of ASRs (Aquifer Storage and Recovery), a key component of the Florida water supply debate.

## *Agriculture Policy*

Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government. (LWVUS)

In the summer of 1995, already a member of the Everglades Coalition, LWVFL took action to participate in the coalition's campaign to eliminate or reduce the sugar price support system under the federal Farm Bill that was due for its five-year review. Utilizing LWVUS agriculture positions, many letters and phone calls were made in this regard. There were some positive outcomes resulting from this campaign that somewhat reduced this support system.



# League of Women Voters of the United States

## *Summary of Policy Positions 2024-2026*

### ● **Representative Government**

Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive.

#### **Voting Rights**

##### *Citizen's Right to Vote*

Protect the right of all citizens to vote and encourage all citizens to vote.

##### *DC Self-Government and Full Voting Representation*

Secure for the citizens of the District of Columbia the rights of self-government and full voting representation in both houses of Congress.

#### **Election Process**

##### *Apportionment*

Support apportionment of congressional districts and elected legislative bodies at all levels of government based substantially on population.

##### *Redistricting*

Support redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote fair and effective representation at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for public participation.

##### *Money in Politics (formerly campaign finance)*

Support campaign finance/MIP regulations that enhances political equality for all citizens, ensures transparency, protects representative democracy from distortion by undisclosed contributions and big money, and combat corruption and undue influence in government. Support campaign spending that is restricted but not banned. Support public financing, full disclosure, abolishing SuperPACs, and creating an effective enforcement agency.

##### *Selection of the President*

Promote the election of the President and Vice-President by direct-popular-vote. Support uniform national voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections. Support efforts to provide voters with sufficient information about candidates.

##### *Voter Representation/Electoral Systems*

Support electoral systems at each level of government that encourage participation, are verifiable and auditable, and enhance representation for all voters.

## **Citizen Rights**

### *Citizen's Right to Know/Public Participation*

Protect the citizen's right to know and facilitate informed understanding and public participation in government decision-making.

### *Individual Liberties*

Oppose major threats to basic constitutional rights.

### *Public Policy on Reproductive Choice*

Protect the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

## **Evaluating Constitutional Amendment Proposals and Constitutional Conventions**

### *Amendment Proposals*

Consider whether a proposal addresses matters of abiding importance, makes our political system more democratic, protects individual rights, could be achieved by a constitutional amendment or legislative proposal, and is consistent with other League positions.

### *Constitutional Conventions*

Hold Constitutional Conventions only when certain conditions are in place, such as: limited to a specific topic, full transparency, delegates selected by population, and voting by delegates not by states.

## **Congress and the Presidency**

### *Congress*

Support responsive legislative processes characterized by accountability, representativeness, decision-making capability, effective performance, and transparency.

### *The Presidency*

Promote a dynamic balance of power between the executive and legislative branches within the framework set by the Constitution.

## **Privatization**

Ensure transparency, accountability, positive community impact and preservation of the common good when considering the transfer of governmental services, assets and/or functions to the private sector.

## **Digital Equity**

Ensure high-speed, affordable internet access is readily available to all US residents and businesses.

## **Decline of Local News and Its Impact on Democracy**

Support credible and ethical journalism as essential to our democracy.

- **International Relations**

Promote peace in an interdependent world by working cooperatively with other nations and strengthening international organizations.

**United Nations**

Support a strong, effective United Nations to promote international peace and security and to address the social, economic, and humanitarian needs of all people.

**Trade**

Support U.S. trade policies that reduce trade barriers; expand international trade; and advance the achievement of humanitarian, environmental, and social goals.

**US Relations with Developing Countries**

Promote U.S. policies that meet long-term social and economic needs of developing countries.

**Arms Control**

Reduce the risk of war through support of arms control measures.

**Military Policy and Defense Spending**

Work to limit reliance on military force. Examine defense spending in the context of total national needs.

- **Natural Resources**

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest.

**Resource Management**

Promote the management of natural resources as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Promote resource conservation, stewardship, and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government. Preserve the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of the ecosystem with maximum protection of public health and the environment.

**Environmental Protection and Pollution Control**

Support the preservation of the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem with maximum protection of public health and the environment.

*Air Quality*

Promote measures to reduce pollution from mobile and stationary sources.

*Energy*

Support environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize

energy conservation, and encourage the use of renewable resources.

#### *Land Use*

Promote policies that manage land as a finite resource and that incorporate principles of stewardship.

#### *Water Resources*

Support measures to reduce pollution in order to protect surface water, groundwater, and drinking water, and set up a process to evaluate inter-basin water transfers.

#### *Waste Management*

Promote policies to reduce the generation of solid and hazardous wastes and promote the reuse and recycling.

#### *Nuclear Issues*

Promote the maximum protection of public health, safety and the environment while encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process.

### **Transfer of Federal Public Lands**

Promote policies that keep federal public lands under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

### **Climate Change**

Support climate goals and policies that are consistent with the best available climate science and that will ensure a stable climate system for future generations.

### **Public Participation**

Promote public understanding and participation in decision-making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources.

### **Federal Agriculture Policy**

Support environmentally sound farm practices and increase reliance on the free market while promoting adequate supplies of food at reasonable prices and regulations to all animal and aquaculture production. Enforce federal antitrust laws to ensure competitive agricultural markets and provide financial support to subsidize agriculture in specific instances. Support the federal government's funding of basic agricultural research to ensure adequate safety of our food supply.

## ● **Social Policy**

Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans.

### **Criminal Justice**

Support a criminal justice system that is just, effective, equitable, transparent, and that

fosters public trust at all stages, including policing practices, pre-trial procedures, sentencing, incarceration, and re-entry.

### **Equality of Opportunity**

Promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families and that the most effective social programs are those designed to prevent or reduce poverty.

#### *Equal Rights*

Support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and efforts to bring laws into compliance with the goals of the ERA. Support equal rights for all under state and federal law regardless of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

#### *Education, Employment, and Housing*

Support equal access to education, employment, and housing.

#### *Federal Role in Public Education*

Support federal policies that provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-K through grade 12.

### **Fiscal Policy**

Provide for adequate and flexible funding of federal government programs.

#### *Federal Deficit*

Promote responsible deficit policies.

#### *Funding of Entitlements*

Support a federal role in providing mandatory, universal, old-age, survivors, disability, and health insurance.

#### *Tax Policy*

Support adequate and flexible funding of federal government programs through an equitable tax system that is progressive overall and that relies primarily on a broad-based income tax.

### **Health Care**

Promote a health care system for the United States that provides affordable access to a basic level of quality care for all U.S. residents, including behavioral health that is integrated with and achieves parity with the physical health care system.

### **Immigration**

Promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business, and employment needs of the United States; be responsive to those facing political

persecution or humanitarian crises; and provide for student visas. Ensure fair treatment under the law for all persons. In transition to a reformed system, support provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.

### **Meeting Basic Human Needs**

Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

#### *Income Assistance*

Support income assistance programs, based on need, that provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing, and shelter.

#### *Support Services*

Provide essential support services.

#### *Housing*

Support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.

### **Child Care**

Support programs and policies to expand the supply of affordable, quality childcare for all who need it.

### **Early Intervention for Children at Risk**

Support policies and programs that promote the well-being, development, and safety of all children.

### **Violence Prevention**

Support violence prevention programs in communities.

### **Gun Policy**

Protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic weapons. Support regulation of firearms for consumer safety.

### **Urban Policy**

Promote the economic health of cities and improve the quality of urban life.

### **Death Penalty**

Support abolition of the death penalty.

### **Sentencing Policy**

Support the exploration and utilization of alternatives to imprisonment, considering the

circumstances and nature of the crime. Oppose mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.

### **Human Trafficking**

Oppose all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

*NOTE: Whatever the issue, the League believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibilities, adequate financing, coordination among levels of government, effective enforcement, and well-defined channels for citizen input and review,*

---

### **Impact on Issues**

Please refer to the latest edition of Impact on Issues for further information on the LWWUS program. This resource document includes statements of position, background and significant past action on each national program issue. Updated after each LWWUS convention, this publication is available free to view or to download in pdf format from [lww.org](http://lww.org) or at nominal cost in paper from the same website.

**LWWUS, 1730 M St. NW, Suite 1000,  
Washington, DC 20036  
or phone toll free 888 287-7424**