

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OKLAHOMA
Summary of Positions in *Program for Action*
November 2015

Note: The following uses the order of presentation established in the League of Women Voters of the US program positions as listed in ***Impact on Issues***.

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

The Election Process

Apportionment

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports action for apportionment of all elected state and local governmental bodies based substantially on population of congressional districts.

The League opposes:

Changes to the U.S. Constitution to allow for consideration of factors other than population in apportionment.

Conflict of Interest

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports strong, enforceable conflict of interest legislation and financial disclosure.

The League supports:

- A strong conflict of interest law;
- Full financial disclosure on the part of all elected and some appointed officials.

Constitutional Criteria

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports a simplified state constitution covering fundamental law and principle.

The League supports:

- A state constitution that clearly defines the responsibilities of the 3 branches of government and that grants them adequate powers to carry out these responsibilities;
- A legislative article that includes a bicameral legislature that meets in annual sessions of unlimited length with some power to call itself into session;
- A constitutional article that insures a citizen's right to legal counsel, restores voting rights of former felons and mental patients and supports citizens' right to initiative and petition;

- An executive article that increases the governor's administrative authority with regard to appointments and to the consolidation of departments and agencies;
- A judicial article that provides a unified court structure; that provides for the removal of justices and judges; that provides for improved methods of judicial election and that has guidelines for the minor court system;
- General provisions in the constitution for a regulatory agency for corporations retaining the right of arbitration and the right of recourse to the courts;
- An article on education that provides for the maintenance and support of a system of free public schools open to all children in the state and supports other public institutions of higher learning as may be desirable;
- The appointment rather than the election of the State Superintendent of Schools;
- An article that includes the equalization of property tax assessments and that requires the governor to present an annual budget message to the Legislature
- The removal of obsolete sections from the Constitution;
- An article that delineates the powers of the legislative body as well as those of county and municipal governments.

The League opposes:

- An article that includes the earmarking of funds;
- Specific mention of debt ceilings and millage caps in the Constitution.

Good Government

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes that government should be representative, responsive, efficient, flexible, and accountable. The structure of government should be flexible enough to provide for increasing and changing needs. Close coordination of government at all levels is desirable. Overlapping of functions and duplication of services should be eliminated.

The League supports:

- Government that guarantees every citizen:
 - Equal access to legislative and administrative processes
 - Equal and adequate service, equitably financed
 - Geographic as well as at-large representation
- Structure of government that:
 - Separate legislative and administrative functions and establish an effective set of checks and balances between the two.
 - Vest final responsibility in a chief executive to assure priority setting, long-range planning, and coordination of departments.
 - Provide for a merit system for government employees.
 - Provide for the initiative, the referendum, and the recall of public officials.

County Government

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes that changes are needed in the operation and management of county government to achieve a government that is efficient, modern and accountable to the people.

Administration

The League supports

- A commissioner form of county government, but feels that this form may not be suitable for all counties;
- The option of home rule to be extended to all counties permitting them to determine their own form of government;
- Commissioners who serve as policy makers for the entire county, not their individual districts;
- Commissioners elected at-large from the district in which they reside
- A county manager hired to carry out administrative responsibilities; Appointed or hired officers should be under the supervision of the county manager;
- Consolidation of county administrative offices;
- City-county cooperation or consolidation of services such as planning, solid waste disposal, libraries, health departments and emergency medical services;
- Inter-county use of data processing and police technical services;
- Employing a county road superintendent to centralize the use of road equipment;
- Re-codified laws pertaining to county government that are easy to locate and understand.

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The League opposes

- The office of County Superintendent of Schools (*note: As of July 1, 1993, the office of county superintendent of schools in and for each county in Oklahoma was abolished by statute*)

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Ethics

The League supports

- The current oath of office with the inclusion of strong penalties for violation of the oath of office;
- A requirement of the disclosure of any conflict of interest by county officers.

Finances:

The League supports

- Ad valorem taxes as the primary source of revenue for county government (Ad valorem taxes must be equalized and assessed consistently);
- Flexibility in raising revenue;

- Legislation permitting an increase in millage levy for counties.
- Requiring county treasurers to invest county funds in interest bearing accounts for the highest and best use of funds;
- Annual unscheduled audits of county funds.

The League opposes

- Earmarking the transfer of funds used for road maintenance.

Natural Resources

Water

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes that water is a life-sustaining resource, that access to water is a basic human right, and that water belongs to the people.

The League supports:

- State policies and procedures, which promote comprehensive long-range planning for conservation and development of water resources;
- Safeguarding both water quality and water quantity;
- Primary focus water conservation to maintain quantity;
- Pollution control to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health;
- Enforcement of water regulation, using both incentives and punishment;
- Adequate funding for enforcement of water regulation;
- Full disclosure of all chemicals used in any process that affects water quality with information made available to the public;
- Continued education at all levels regarding water conservation, quality and availability;
- Long-term planning for water resources, watersheds and infrastructure;
- Research to enable the most fair and conservative use of water resources.

The League opposes:

- Strict adherence to private ownership of water (riparian rights).

SOCIAL POLICY

Corrections

The League of Women Voters believes that the Oklahoma penal system must be improved.

The League supports::

- A degree in the behavioral sciences and experience in corrections for all administrative offices in the Department of Corrections;
- A Division of Inspection within the Department of Corrections;

- A pre-sentence investigation for every convicted felon;
- A centrally located diagnostic facility to decide on the placement or assignment of convicted felons;
- A centralized prisoner record system;
- One maximum security facility with a population limit of 500;
- More medium security facilities, limited in size and located near metropolitan areas;
- More community treatment centers established as minimum security facilities;
- Increased training and education programs for medium and minimum facility inmates;
- Utilization of community rehabilitation measures as a means to reduce the prison population;
- Clear, reasonable and well defined prison rules and regulations;
- Due process in prison disciplinary actions.

The League opposes:

- The current “experience equivalent” accepted in lieu of an appropriate degree for administrative offices in the Department of Corrections.

Sentencing

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes that the primary purpose of imposing criminal sanctions is for the protection of the public. Rehabilitation is one means of achieving this purpose.

The League supports::

- Uniform sentences throughout the state;
- Sentencing for criminal acts by judges rather than juries;
- An increase in the dollar amount of theft, embezzlement, and like offenses, in order for the crime to qualify as a felony;
- A major role of sentencing other than imprisonment;
- Increased involvement of the community at all stages of the criminal justice system.
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Parole

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports a State Pardon and Parole Board with the Governor removed from any involvement in the parole process.

The League supports::

- Stringent ethical requirements for members of the Pardon and Parole Board;
- Experience in corrections for members of the Pardon and Parole Board;

- Lack of political involvement in the naming of individuals to the Pardon and Parole Board;
- An individualized parole plan based on uniform criteria for each inmate;
- Parole officers who are professionally qualified and who have reduced caseloads;
- The involvement of professionally qualified personnel in all parole investigations and reports;
- Legal counsel and due process for those whose parole is revoked..

The League opposes:

- Pardon and Parole Board members who are officers in any political party or who seek to hold elective office while a member of the Board;
- Political involvement in the naming of individuals to the Pardon and Parole Board.

Reintegration of (Female) Offenders

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes that barriers to successful integration of (female) offenders should be removed.

The League supports:

- Restoration of voting rights upon discharge from incarceration;
- Programs to improve job skills for all inmates;
- Assistance with work-related transportation upon release;
- Courses to enable inmates to apply for Title VIII housing upon release;
- Assistance in obtaining the documents necessary to secure housing as well as other needs;
- Access to appropriate health care including substance abuse, dental and mental health programs;
- Adequate funding to support the health care needs of those recently released.

Transportation

In order to reduce highway congestion, fuel consumption and vehicular pollution, and to provide better access to housing, jobs, recreation and medical care, the League of Women Voters believes that development of transit and transportation systems should be environmentally responsible and provide adequate access to affordable transportation for all citizens.

The League supports:

- Development and maintenance of energy-efficient and time-efficient public transportation systems within and between communities in Oklahoma and the region
- Prioritizing government-funded transportation projects that support public access to fuel efficient transportation

- Reduction of single occupancy vehicles on the roadways

Judicial System

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports a modern, efficient court system accountable to the people.

The League supports:

- Maintaining the appellate defense system in Oklahoma at a level that guarantees all United States constitutional rights to defendants;
- Adequately funding indigent defense in each legislative budget to insure that the Defender Division will operate in a timely, diligent and efficient manner;
- Choosing the members of the Council on Judicial Complaints in such a way that guarantees the public that the Council is independent of any political and special interest;
- The Council on Judicial Complaints reporting the actual outcomes of judicial complaints from the public, using objective criteria that protect privacy concerns yet adequately and fairly describe how each complaint was addressed;
- The merit selection of all the judiciary;
- The widest possible dissemination of information about the judicial system and the qualification of judicial candidates;
- Objective evaluation of state judicial performance for purposes of public information;
- The expanded use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods and evaluation of the effect of ADR on citizen satisfaction, court caseload throughout the state system and the increase or decrease in court-paid personnel;
- A survey study of female gender bias in Oklahoma courts with the state courts providing subsequent educational efforts for court personnel and judicial officials.

The League opposes:

- Paying attorneys from local court-generated fees or the state judicial fund;
- The state's assuming the maintenance and utility expenses incurred by the district courts in each county courthouse;
- All appearances of female gender bias in the state courts

Juvenile Justice

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports an improved juvenile justice system.

The League supports:

- Protection of the basic constitutional rights of all parties;
- Reduction of recidivism among offenders;

- Separation and different treatment for delinquents, for dependent and neglected children and for children in need of supervision;
- An adequate number of secure, local detention beds and regional treatment centers;
- Strict and certain consequences for serious criminal acts while preserving a system that has as its goal not punishment but rather the teaching of responsible behavior;
- Emphasis on positive motivation, self-respect and respect for the rules of society;
- A wide range of placement options including home placements, foster homes and group homes with institutions serving as a last resort;
- Early intervention, prevention, diagnostic and remedial measures;
- Coordination and cooperation between different parts of the system with emphasis placed on solving or eliminating jurisdictional conflicts;
- Greater insistence on the privacy of records and on the publication of opportunities and procedures for having records expunged;
- Training in juvenile and family law for judges;
- A family court in each judicial district;
- Special training for all personnel dealing with juveniles;
- A reverse certification system for 16 and 17 year olds who commit serious or violent offenses;
- An individual certification process for younger offenders;
- Consequences that are appropriate to the age of the child and the offense committed;
- A professional assessment in every case that includes an analysis of the circumstances and nature of the crime, the age of the child, his or her previous record, current circumstances, knowledge, maturity and capacity for rehabilitation;
- Community or regional based facilities, both temporary and permanent, separate from adult jails and institutions for serious offenders;
- Involvement of the parents in community based programs with provision for family guidance clinics and family courts, and provision for parenting education;
- Encouragement for use of volunteers as well as professionals in the juvenile justice system.

Education

Education Finance: Common and Higher

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes that quality education for all children in Oklahoma depends on adequate financing.

Common School Education Financing

The League supports:

- the state assuming the major responsibility for financing common schools;
- the state assuming responsibility for equalizing financial resources among school districts;

- the major portion of financing common schools move away from a base of ad valorem taxes;
- continued improvement of assessment practices;
- the removal of constitutional limitation on millage;
- broad based sources such as income and sales tax used to provide funds;
- mandatory kindergarten for all children by the state;
- special education including services for gifted children;
- removal of loopholes in tax laws including the exemptions from property taxes;
- the requirement that each school district vote the maximum millage;
- consideration of formulas other than Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for state aid;

Higher Education Financing (including career and technical education)

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes that adequate financing, expenditure accountability, and efficient financial procedures are the keys to providing quality higher education in Oklahoma.

The League supports:

- state government assuming the major responsibility for financing state institutions of higher learning.

Education Administration

Higher Education

The League supports:

- restructuring of the boards of higher education in order to provide better governance;
- the coordinating board, the State Board of Regents of Higher Education, remain a Constitutional board.

Career Tech

The League supports:

- a significant role for vocation-technical education in total education
- counseling in career education;
- providing opportunities for youth and adults in vocational-technical education;

Common Schools

The League supports:

- An appointed Superintendent of Public Education;

- Members of the State Board of Education, whether appointed or elected, be selected to represent districts based on population such as Congressional Districts;
- Reorganization of school districts, as well as the equalized collection and distribution of ad valorem tax.

Accountability

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports a system of accountability that includes goal setting, citizen involvement and evaluation.

Textbook Selection

- The League supports:
- A statewide adoption process for textbook selection, but not limiting the selection to any specific number—only approve or disapprove all submitted materials;
- A flexible process that includes both textbooks and other learning materials;
- Local school district being permitted to use state funds for learning materials appropriate to a course of study;
- Selection criteria be evaluated to remove all redundant, obsolete, inappropriate and insignificant items;
- Teachers responsible for selecting materials at state or local level be given adequate time free of other duties to accomplish the task;
- Selection committee members have required training to critically analyze materials with regard to curriculum, accuracy of content and appropriateness of method;
- Selection committee members be assisted by using textbook evaluations prepared by professional organizations, field-testing or pilot programs;
- Refusal to adopt a textbook or series be accompanied by an explanation of the reasons for rejection to the publisher.

Corporal Punishment

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma opposes corporal punishment in the public schools of Oklahoma. The League feels that the most effective approaches to discipline in the public schools emphasizes preventive, diagnostic and remedial measures and helps to instill self-respect in children and adolescents.

Secondary School Curriculum

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma recommends that the legislature review core requirements to allow for electives and options in meeting graduation requirements in order to reflect the values of the local district.

Core requirements for graduation should be set by professional educators, legislators and citizens working together.

Core requirements should include

- Math,
- Science,
- Government, economics, history
- Language arts

The League opposes legislated mandates of individual class objectives or PASS (priority academic student skills)

Objectives(?graduation or course?) should be regulated by a committee of professional educators, teachers and administrators. The objectives should be consistent throughout the state.

Objectives for all classes required for graduation should be available to the public

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma suggests local districts offer a variety of electives that emphasize knowledge for generating informed future voters and the development of life skills.

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports state or federal resources be available to help meet mandates.

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports high schools looking to higher education institutions, including community and junior colleges and career tech schools in order to offer advanced courses and electives.

Fiscal Policy

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma believes a tax system should provide adequate funds for essential government services without creating inequities in assessing taxes.

The League supports:

- reduction of earmarking of state revenues;
- having all property taxes of public service properties in the state collected on a statewide basis, then allocated to the various school districts on a formula basis;
- repealing the sales tax on food and prescription drugs (note sales tax on prescription drugs were repealed in 1982);
- raising the corporate income tax;
- providing the statewide distribution of the gross production tax revenue dedicated for common schools;
- accountability in reporting by trusts and authorities;
- state-financed qualified, impartial committee to study collection, allocation and administration of state revenues.

Property Tax Assessment (Procedures)

The League supports:

- appointment of county assessors;
- equalization of tax assessments among and within counties;
- county assessors with the following qualifications;
 - professional qualifications;
 - appointed by a board to include local and county officials from a list certified by a state agency;
 - fulfill requirement to take training provided by the state;
 - fulfill requirement to follow prescribed uniform statewide assessment procedures;
 - Authority given to Oklahoma Tax Commission to enforce procedures;
 - Annual report on sales/ratio studies conducted by the Oklahoma Tax Commission with provision to keep appraisals at current market value.

Property Tax Exemption (Reform)

The League of Women Voters believes all tax exempt property should be evaluated regularly with reporting available to the public

The League supports:

- exemptions on real property affording relief to low-income individuals;
- non-renewable, short term tax exemption for Industrial Trusts (note: a 1985 Constitutional Amendment gave 5 year exemption for new or expanding manufacturing facilities;)
- exemptions granted to charitable, religious, and educational institutions should apply only to property used for those purposes.

The League opposes:

- personal property tax on household goods;
- under current law, the taxation of homeowners' household goods without equal taxation of renters' household goods.

Municipal Finance

The League supports:

- additional means for providing adequate revenue for municipalities
- granting cities options for taxing power and reallocation of resources
- appointment of a municipal representative to county excise board

Mental Health

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports delivery of mental health services and mental illness treatment in addressing these needs in Oklahoma's population.

The League supports:

- universal mental health needs assessment every decade for the entire population, including incarcerated, to be used for planning purposes;
- universal survey to be done after any major revision in the structure of state-provided mental health services;
- input from citizens and service providers, as well as all funding sources be included in the survey;
- state supported identification and prevention programs in schools and child care programs;
- state supported child mental health services with adequate payment system in place;
- state supported monitoring of effectiveness of mental health programs to ensure accountability and assist with allocation of funds;
- strategic planning for treatment of all mental illnesses based on epidemiological data which addresses all populations, including minorities;
- funding for training of personnel for delivery of services based on community need;
- improved access to mental illness services;
- adequate funding for state agencies dealing with mental illness and for outpatient centers.

The League opposes:

- Diversion of mentally ill children and adults into the corrections system.

Living Will

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports an individual's right to make or assign personal medical decisions relating to their process of dying.

The League supports:

- A durable power of attorney within the Living Will;
- Binding effect for individuals in a persistent unconscious state;
- The right of an individual 18 or older to execute a Living Will;
- The obligation of health care professionals to respect the individual's rights and wishes as expressed in her/his Living Will.

The League opposes:

- A requirement of a terminal diagnosis prior to making and signing a Living Will;
- A time limit on the validity of the Living Will.

Teenage Pregnancy Prevention

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma supports strategies to help reduce adolescent pregnancies in Oklahoma.

The League supports:

- Options and opportunities for life styles that stimulate self-sufficiency and self-esteem in order to reduce adolescent pregnancies and births;
- Better opportunities for obtaining academic skills that create an incentive for learning and a desire to stay in school;
- More opportunities for jobs and training in work skills to develop good work habits and a positive attitude toward work as well as to alleviate poverty;
- More training opportunities in family life education and life planning with emphasis on the responsibility of sexuality, being a parent and providing for the future;
- Access for all teens, both male and female, to health services, including contraceptives and counseling on the responsibility of choosing whether or not to be sexually active;
- Resources for adolescents to help instill self-respect and an appreciation of their own capabilities and talents.