



GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

Winter 2007-08

Consensus Questions on Redistricting Ready for Member Response

League members are encouraged to weigh in with their comments on the consensus questions for the Redistricting and Voting Methods study. The Vermont League's current position is rather out of date (having been eclipsed by Supreme Court rulings, which have mandated compact contiguous district boundaries, etc.)

Some state Leagues, such as the Arizona League, have pursued redistricting reform based on the concept of non-partisan independent redistricting commissions, with the goal of avoiding partisan gerrymandering and promoting more competitive elections. However, after winning a constitutional amendment to the Arizona constitution, the shortcomings of that reform became apparent. The first elections following independent redistricting were actually less competitive, with more "safe seats" than in the past. This reflects the simple fact that voters tend to live near like-minded voters (e.g. liberal urban voters and conservative rural voters), so the independently and fairly drawn districts failed to promote competitive elections. While the U.S. League is still focusing on independent redistricting commissions as a viable reform, some Arizona Leaguers have advised us to avoid following their path and look at deeper reforms instead.

On the Vermont League web site there are a number of articles that deal with this issue, and present the case that it is impossible to have election districts that are both highly representative of the residents living there and also competitive at election time, as long as single-member winner-take-all elections are used. Articles by professors Alan Abramowitz, Brad Alexander and Matthew Gunning suggest the only way to avoid gerrymandering while promoting both representative districts and competitive elections is to use multi-member districts coupled with some sort of proportional voting method.

You will find the articles on the Vermont League web site informative and thought-provoking. We hope you will give them a look and also respond to the consensus questions proposed by the Vermont study committee and the state board. You can find the consensus questions on pages 5 & 6.

Terry Bouricius

LWVUS Program Planning

In the League, "Program" is a three-part process that is a core component of the League's mission, composed of program planning, study and consensus, and advocacy.

Every two years state and local Leagues participate in the LWVUS Program Planning process by
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President's Message

Winter 2007-08

A Critical Message for the Membership



You've all heard compliments about the good work the League does. Indeed the League is one of the most respected lobbying organizations out there. Congress listens to us as do most State Legislatures. That access and respect exists because of the way in which the League operates. League positions are developed from a grass roots process in which the voices of all participating members are heard. Our government knows that the positions they hear from League members represent well thought out input from many voices. And since no money changes hands, government officials know that there is no quid pro quo expected. There is a kind of purity in that that is seldom found in the American political process.

There is a huge amount of work involved in getting from the individual League member to the ear of the Speaker of the House in Vermont and beyond that, in Washington. LWVVT is fortunate to have a handful of members who keep the machinery going so that our presence is felt and acknowledged at both state and national levels. But therein lies the rub.

The board occasionally asks for member volunteers to complete specific tasks, such as the short list in my message in the previous issue of the GMC. There has been very little response and again the small cadre of active members may find themselves doing it all because things have to get done.

The League is a membership-driven organization but only a small percentage is doing the driving. What would it take to get you to participate? What are we doing wrong? What are we not doing? What issues and activities would engage you? Please let us know your interests and concerns. Help keep the League

alive and active by at least providing us with feedback.

Speaking of feedback, there are two important opportunities to make your opinions known:

First, the consensus questions for the redistricting study are in this issue. For this study, the consensus will be by mail-in responses. Study materials are posted on the state website at www.lwvofvt.org. Please go through those materials, fill out the response form, and mail it to study chairman Terry Bouricius, c/o LWVVT, P.O. Box 8266, Essex, VT 05451. The deadline for responses is February 15th. More background information about the study and the response form can be found on pages 4 & 5.

The LWVUS Convention is coming up in June, and it's time to let national know what our priorities are for the next biennium. Is there an issue not covered by current LWVUS positions that you would like examined? Would you like a current position re-examined? Information on how you can participate can be found on the LWVUS website.

A happy, healthy and productive 2008 to you.

Kate

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Kate Rader, President
Claudette Sortino, Editor

Membership in the League includes a
subscription. If you would like to join the
League, e-mail, write, or call:

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A Four Year Term for Vermont's Governor?

LWVVT has long supported four-year terms for Vermont's Governor and Lieutenant Governor. Only two states continue to have the shorter term. There appears to be some activity in the Legislature this year to change to a four-year term.

On November 6th, a debate was sponsored by the Snelling Center on this topic. Former Governor Madeleine Kunin took the position in favor of a four-year term while Professor Frank Bryan of UVM argued for the status quo. The debate was moderated by Chris Graff.

Until 1870, Vermont's governors served one-year terms. Since the arrival of the two-year term, 18 attempts have been made to go to four years. In 1974 the issue actually went to a public referendum but was defeated by approximately 42,000 to 38,000 votes.

Governor Kunin began her discussion by stating that a four-year term would result in more good policies and less bad politics. She claimed that the two-year term resulted in 6 months of celebrating victory followed by 18 months of running for reelection. With states finding themselves more responsible for national issues like health care and global warming, making good policy takes lots more time than it used to when the governor's job was really part-time, which hasn't been the case for decades now. She said that it was good for elected officials to go often before the people for the sake of accountability,

But elections have become very expensive. The over a million dollars now being spent for each election, special interest money becomes a bigger player. Then to whom is the governor beholden?

Professor Bryan responded that Vermont's governors actually do have four-year terms since only two governors have ever served less than that. He said that the cost per vote in each gubernatorial election is about four dollars. He

maintained that keeping the two-year term preserves the ability to get rid of a marginal official very quickly if necessary. He also brought up the fact that shifting to a four-year term would bring about the need for a recall provision and term limits in the Constitution. Professor Bryan said that the two-year term works, that Vermont is always very high in ranking on civic culture. He concluded by using the old chestnut, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it".

Governor Kunin noted that no state that had changed from a two to four year term ever returned to a two-year term. Most of those states did also introduce term limits and a recall mechanism. With a two-year term limit there always seems to be a campaign going on. She also stated that that serving a four-year term makes it easier for a governor to take risks since he or she does not always have to be looking over the shoulder.

Professor Bryan responded that the two-year term keeps politics and politicians closer to the people. He maintains that Vermont has a better democracy than most other states because of the availability of its office holders and that the two-year gubernatorial term is very much a part of that.

Both debaters unequivocally supported the two-year term for both the Senate and the House. LWVVT does not have a position on this.

There are presently two constitutional amendment proposals under consideration in the Senate to expand term lengths for the Governor and Lieutenant Governor. An amendment proposal must pass the Senate with a two-thirds majority and then a simple majority in the House. Then there must be majority approval by the voters. Only then could the constitutional change take place and the earliest that could occur is in the general election of 2010. The first four-year term governor would then be elected in the year 2012.

Claudette Sortino

(cont'd from page 1)

making recommendations concerning a possible new national study in the next biennium. *This is how the League remains a grassroots organization.* Those recommendations are reviewed by the board of the LWVUS who recommends program to the LWVUS convention in June. The convention then votes and makes the final decision whether the League will conduct a new study, review an existing position, or simply retain all the current positions.

The full text and history of each position can be found in *Impact on Issues*, which is available at www.lwv.org, click on "for members" - "tools for leaders" - "action chair" (on left side of screen) and "impact on issues." You can download a PDF of the document.

You may want to join the LWVUS Program Planning discussion list, where members will be discussing and/or promoting issues and the program planning process. Instructions are on the LWVUS website, www.lwv.org.

Please think about possible national issues not covered by current positions, and attend your unit's program planning meeting. As with the immigration consensus, the LWVUS is accepting program planning reports from local and state Leagues only, not from individual members. If there is no local program planning meeting near you, e-mail or phone Kate (catherine.rader@verizon.net; 802-229-4737) before the state board meeting on February 9th to have your views included in our discussion.

Criteria for Selection of Debate Participants

LWVVT has determined that candidates participating in League sponsored debates in 2008 must meet the following criteria:

1. Constitutional eligibility – The candidate must meet the requirements of the Vermont constitution and the constitution of the United States.
2. Ballot access – The candidate must meet all requirements to be on the ballot according to Vermont election laws.
3. Evidence must exist that a formal campaign is being waged, such as the presence of a headquarters, campaign staff, issuance of position papers, campaign appearances, and/or demonstration of significant support by means of a funding base or campaign organization.

Legislative Priorities

Our Legislative priorities this coming session will be IRV, Same day voter registration, four year term for the governor, education finance, and watching the discussion on how to finance Catamount Health.

The biggest problem is the huge demand on the Vermont taxpayer dollar. The House Ways and Means Committee has a bill coming out to use the income tax for schools but the House also wants to use some of the income tax for the health plan. So many proposals are also compromises—in order to try for passage of new ideas. For instance, the IRV bill covers the two federal offices only—the House and Senate. The thinking is that if it can pass this year, then maybe later they can add in state offices.

The four year term for governor is compromised by senators vying to have the four year term include legislators. We have been trying for a four year term for governor since the earth was ruled by dinosaurs and now our legislators do this to complicate things. We will do our best to update the LWVVT website.

Vee Gordon

2008 Legislative Day

Our annual Legislative Day has been scheduled for Wednesday, February 6. We hope to see you there.

As we did last year, we will make arrangements for lunch at a local restaurant. Last year's affair at the Thrush Tavern was very successful, with the set-up promoting easy one-on-one conversations with our legislators.

Information about our legislative priorities and the status of bills of interest will be posted on the state website (www.lwvofvt.org). Of particular interest this year are same-day voter registration, a constitutional amendment for a four-year term for government, education finance, health care and changes to last year's omnibus energy bill.

Last year we recognized that some of you have a long drive to get to Montpelier, so come when it's convenient. Information about committee schedules and which bills are under discussion will be on the website, so you can attend those meetings that are of interest to you. We will be gathering for lunch at noon. You are urged to ask your legislators to join us. Last year there were about an equal number of League members and legislators at the lunch – an ideal situation.

Again, details about lunch and bills of interest under consideration will be posted on our website.

Please join us on the 6th.

Consensus Questions for Redistricting and Voting Methods for Representative Bodies

The purpose of this study was to examine impartial ways of drawing legislative district boundaries and alternative ways of voting to assure the majority is represented by a majority of seats, but also to allow political minorities to be proportionally represented.

There are constitutional mandates that districts be contiguous, compact and respectful of existing political boundaries and communities of interest. However, these criteria still leave the door open to substantial gerrymandering. Vermont's use of multi-seat districts may reduce the impact of gerrymandering, but as long as winner-take-all plurality voting methods are used, the overall makeup of legislative bodies can still veer substantially away from the voting preferences of the electorate.

Go to our website, www.lwvofvt.org, for background information about different voting systems.

Consensus for this study will be determined through mail-in responses to the following questions. Send the completed form to Terry Bouricius, Chair, 56 Booth St., Burlington, VT 05401.

Question 1: The dual goals of having districts that are both highly representative of the residents (that is, a substantial majority feel well represented by their legislators), and competitive (that is, elections are close enough that voters feel their vote matters and they can hold an incumbent accountable), are inevitably in conflict in single-seat districts.

On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very important and 5 is not important at all, how important are each of these two goals to you?

Districts are:

Representative (few voters feel un-represented)

1 2 3 4 5

Competitive (elections are usually fairly close, so people feel their vote matters)

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

Question 2: To the extent that the two desirable goals of having a representative that:

1) lives geographically near you, or 2) that accurately reflects your policy preferences, may be in conflict, which criterion do you value?

On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very important and 5 is not important at all, how important are each of these two criteria to you?

Geographic proximity (your state representative lives in your town)

1 2 3 4 5

Policy agreement (your state representative agrees with your policy views)

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

Question 3: If the only feasible way to promote both competitive elections and more fully representative delegations is to have multi-seat districts using some form of semi-proportional voting method (such as cumulative* voting) or fully proportional representation voting method (such as ranked choice* voting), should that be considered?

- a) In special cases where racial or language minorities are geographically diffuse, making single-seat districts an impractical way of achieving representation of these groups? yes___ no___ undecided___
- b) In cases where other kinds of substantial minorities, such as political minorities, are poorly represented, or completely unrepresented in legislative bodies? yes___ no___ undecided___
- c) In virtually any case, in order to promote elections that are simultaneously competitive and representative? yes___ no___ undecided___
- d) Never? yes___ no___ undecided___

Comments _____

**Cumulative Voting* is a semi-proportional voting method that has been used to settle a number of voting rights law suits to allow racial minorities to win election to municipal government bodies. In multi-seat districts, voters have as many votes as seats, but can give all of their votes to one candidate, or spread them around as they wish. This allows significant minorities to elect a proportionate minority of seats, as long as they strategically nominate or vote for a limited number of candidates. *Ranked-choice Voting* in multi seat districts works similarly to the way IRV works for single seat elections, and is fully proportional, in that like-minded voters can elect a number of seats in rough proportion to their numbers among the electorate without the need to strategically limit nominations.

Call to Council

First Call to Council, 2008

Saturday, May 3, 2008, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Langevin Farmhouse Conference Center
Vermont Technical College, Randolph

Registration Fee, \$15, Lunch included

Keynote speaker:

Tanya Stone, author of "Elizabeth Leads the Way," a young person's biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Vermont's Electricity Future

The Vermont Department of Public Service has launched a far reaching effort to involve the public in the long range planning for electric energy in the future. The long-term contract with Hydro Quebec and the license for Vermont Yankee both expire in 2012. These sources currently provide two-thirds of Vermont's electric energy. The Department conducted five regional workshops in October for the general public and a deliberative polling exercise for a randomly selected group of 200 people in November.

Kate Rader and I attended the public workshop in Montpelier and it was quite an interesting evening. We were given a number when we arrived which assigned us to different discussion groups for the evening. Each table had a facilitator. After dinner we were given a quick course in electric power planning and Vermont's current electric energy mix. Some interesting facts included:

- Currently Vermont has the lowest electric rates in New England
- Vermont currently gets approximate 47% of its electricity from renewable sources
- Vermont's carbon footprint is relatively low – 2/3 comes from hydropower and nuclear power

- Planners estimate that efficiency could meet approximately 15% of current needs by 2015 at a cost of 3 cents per kilowatt-hour
- Growth in residential energy use has been flat since the 1970s-reflecting efforts to improve efficiency.

Following the presentation, we had a facilitated discussion to come up significant challenges and promising options. We also framed questions for a panel of experts who would take the questions after this session.

It was quite clear at the outset that a very large contingent of wind power proponents were present and their interests influenced much of the discussion. Since Green Mountain Power operates the only commercial wind generation in the state, Bob Griffin from GMP was able to provide the commercial perspective to this issue.

The most interesting part of the evening came after the discussions and expert Q&A. We had each received a small keypad with our table number when we arrived. At this point, a series of questions was put up on a large screen with multiple choice answers. We would each record our choice by pressing the keypad, and then the answers were tallied and flashed on the screen. The group that evening was strongly committed to the use of renewable energy, especially wind power, and wanted to promote more in-state power generation. The support for more energy efficiency measures was also strong, and the support for nuclear power was very low. The most surprising result was the number of people willing to pay as much as \$30 a month more for electricity from renewable sources.

The results of the five regional meetings and the Deliberative Process event have not yet been released. A report to the Legislature is planned. These sessions were followed by on-line conferences for specific business and government groups. To keep up with the progress of this effort, visit the website: www.vermontenergyfuture.info.

Sonja Schuyler, State Board

GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

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CALENDAR

February 6, 2008	Legislative Day (State House)
February 9, 2008	LWVVT Board Meeting (Hartland)
February 13, 2008	LWVVT display in the State House Card Room
February 15, 2008	Deadline for returning Redistricting Consensus questions
March 8, 2008	LWVVT Board Meeting (Montpelier)
May 3, 2008	LWVVT Council, Vermont Technical College, Randolph
May 17-18, 2008	Quad States Leadership Conference (Location TBA)