

HOW SUSTAINABILITY FITS INTO OUR POSITIONS

LWVCO Sustainability Committee---October 2009

It is important to understand exactly what **Sustainability** means with regards to the three areas of League of Women Voters positions. What *is* Sustainable Government? What *is* Sustainable Social Policy? What *is* Sustainable Natural Resources? And, how does it all *fit together*?

SUSTAINABLE GOVERNMENT:

League's Government positions include stands on Apportionment, Campaign Finance, the General Assembly, the Justice System, School Finance, and Voting Rights. Our democratic government rests on these foundations and others that we have studied and decidededly belong in our Program for Study and Action. They are the backbone of our organization when we take action and declare our support or opposition on legislative or ballot issues.

If our government is not representative of its people, responsive to its citizens, equitable and flexible, protective of the right to vote, transparent and open to its citizens, or does not provide equal access to public education and equal opportunity for all then we do not have a sustainable government.

If our government is accessible only to a few powerful and wealthy entities, it does not look to the needs of its people and does not represent the people of our country then we do not have a democracy. We must guard these rights for all the people of our country to maintain a sustainable government that is based on our Constitution of equality. So LWV positions fit into a definition of sustainability because we are maintaining these rights for ourselves as well as preserving them for future generations.

SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL POLICY:

Similarly, League Social Policy positions include stands on Children's Support Systems, Education, Equality of Opportunity, Health Care, Housing and Income Assistance. If the citizens of our country and state do not have access to quality education, quality health care, adequate housing, equal opportunity and protection from discrimination then we will not have a sustainable society. We will not be able to maintain a society of educated, healthy, and productive people for now and the future if we do not protect these rights through our positions.

SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCES:

Natural Resources is the one area most of us can relate to sustainability and it is probably the most tangible piece of the sustainability pie, the one we have heard about the most and perhaps are doing the most about to *be* sustainable. Our positions on Air Quality, Energy, Water, Environmental Planning and Management, Land Use and more may already include the word *sustainable* or at least *planning*, *preserving*, etc. We understand that if we do not sustain our natural environment we will not succeed in preserving ourselves much less our future generations.

HOW DOES IT ALL FIT TOGETHER?

Sustainability is a way of life which seeks a balance in meeting current environment, economic and human needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet the same goal.

The concept of Sustainability is implicit in the Principles of the League of Women Voters. League positions are in compliance with the fundamental principle of sustainability, recognizing the interdependency among issues of public policy, and the impact of current decisions on the global welfare of future generations.

Sustainability is an overarching philosophy we should consider when contemplating action on our positions. It is important to look at legislation, ballot issues and other actions League takes a stand on to see if the result of the legislation, ballot issue or other action is sustainable today or furthers sustainability for tomorrow.

And, does the sustainability of a governmental issue conflict with the ability of a Social or Natural Resource policy to be sustainable? For example, Social Policy frequently requires that many sides of the legislation come together to form a bill that can succeed to passage: Is the financing available—who may have to pay more or receive less? Who is backing this bill? Who benefits? Or a Natural Resource bill: Who wants the legislation—a special interest group that will benefit to the detriment of other groups? What happens to an energy plant upstream that may need to release warm water into a cool mountain stream if an environment policy is enacted that forbids this? Who pays for the company to “fix” things? Can the company sustain itself if the cost is too high? Or does the stream suffer if the company can persuade the legislature to kill the bill? Is the stream now unsustainable for the future?

Government, Social Policy and Natural Resources can all come into play when legislation is considered in the State House and perhaps, all in one bill. Is the final result sustainable for all those who are affected—the business, the stream, the jobs created or lost, the water people drink or the fish swim in?

The current debate on Health Care is a good example of how sustainability is or is not being considered. Who are the active participants in the debate and why? Are the people being represented? Is the process transparent? Is the financing sustainable? Who is going to get covered—everyone equally, some, those with money? Is our health care sustainable—now or in the future?

By adding a definition to the Principles of the League of Women Voters of Colorado, the principle of Sustainability will become something to be considered when action is contemplated on legislation, ballot issues, or other action items by the League.