

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OREGON:
SUCCESS AS A PUBLIC INTEREST ORGANIZATION: 1999-PRESENT

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by

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A THESIS

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Title: A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMAN VOTERS OF OREGON: SUCCESS AS A PUBLIC INTEREST ORGANIZATION IN THE PRESENT

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The League of Woman Voters of Oregon and the League's Education Fund are two primary organizations that have provided political advocacy and attempts to inform the Oregon constituency through various means. Although the League has a substantial influence which has been demonstrated in legislative work groups and committee selections, membership is also in decline.

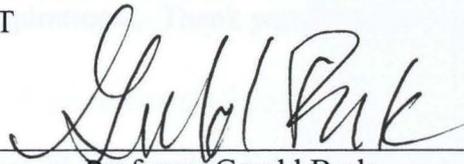
This thesis examines the historical background of the most recent legislative sessions in response to League advocacy, as well as featuring personal narratives of three League lobbyists, and a survey of influential members, to investigate the decline of civic volunteerism, as well as the women in the workforce, which dramatically impacted the current status of the League. In order for this organization to survive in the future, it must alter its current organizational structure. This document is proposed to assist the League transition into a successful future non-profit.

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Sarah Anne Koski for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Political Science to be taken June 2006

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The League of Women Voters of Oregon and the League's Education Fund are two primary organizations that foster political advocacy and attempt to inform the Oregon constituency through voter service and issue-based reports. Although the League has a substantial influence within the Oregon State Legislature as a non-partisan public interest organization, it is often overlooked by legislators during political work groups and committee selections. Membership is also in decline.

This thesis examines the historical background of the past four Legislative sessions in response to League advocacy, as well as featuring personal interviews of three League lobbyists, and a survey of influential members; it ultimately finds that the decline of civic volunteerism, as well as the women in the workforce, have dramatically impacted the current status of the League. In order for this non-profit group to survive in the future, it must alter its current organizational structure. Two suggestions are proposed to assist the League transition into a successful future non-profit.

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I. Intro		8
V. Poli		8
VIII. M		12
XI. Oregon's 71 st Legislative Session: Summer 2001		14
XII. Oregon's 72 nd Legislative Session: Summer 2003		16
XIII. 2004: Funding Oregon Study		19
XIV. Oregon's 73 rd Legislative Session: Summer 2005		20
XV. 2006: Awards and Honors		23
XVI. Interviews: Personal Perspectives of the League		24
XVII. Liz Frenkel		25
XVIII. Ellen Maddex		27
XIX. Paula Krane		28
XX. Survey		29
XXI. Survey Responses		30
XXII. Conclusion		35

Table of Contents

I. Introduction		1
II. 1920: Formation of the League of Women Voters of Oregon		2
III. A Brief History of the National League		3
IV. League Mission and Position Statements		4
V. Political Action and the League		5
VI. Local Leagues and Advocacy		7
VII. League of Women Voter's Education Fund		8
VIII. Membership		10
IX. Legislative Reports		11
X. Oregon's 70 th Legislative Session: Summer 1999		12
XI. Oregon's 71 st Legislative Session: Summer 2001		14
XII. Oregon's 72 nd Legislative Session: Summer 2003		16
XIII. 2004: Funding Oregon Study		19
XIV. Oregon's 73 rd Legislative Session: Summer 2005		20
XV. 2006: Awards and Honors		23
XVI. Interviews: Personal Perspectives of the League		24
XVII. Liz Frenkel		25
XVIII. Ellen Maddex		27
XIX. Paula Krane		28
XX. Survey		29
XXI. Survey Responses		30
XXII. Conclusion		35

I. Introduction

The League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) is a non-profit public interest organization aimed in assisting Oregon's constituency with non-biased information pertaining to local issues, current legislation, and candidate forums. The two primary goals of this non-profit group include education and advocacy. While the League lobbies within the state and local branches of government, the League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund (LWVOREF) is a tax-deductible division of the organization. Members of the League may volunteer within both the political spectrum of advocacy and the research-driven Education Fund. Those who choose to participate in a LWVOREF study spend up to two years researching, editing, publishing, and distributing their material. Often, these educational reports follow specific statewide current events or pertinent legislation.

Although the League is a thriving organization within the realm of political recognition and respect, it is often forgotten in legislative workgroups and committee appointments. Since the organization is non-profit and speaks on behalf of the public, it is usually systematically overlooked when competing with paid interest-based lobbyists. However, League volunteers are extremely successful in providing testimony, working individually with Legislators, and swaying votes because they have a long-term history of maintaining a non-partisan, educational-based outlook on proposed legislation. Legislators understand that LWVOR lobbyists volunteer their time to support or oppose bills based on position statements derived from their thoroughly researched Education Fund reports. These statements are the basis on which League lobbyists formulate their stance within state and local politics.

(I) In June, the governing council of the new League decided to recommend as its first activity a study of state laws having to do with education and the legal

Oregon's League of Women Voters hosts their main state office and political action hub in Salem, Oregon. This office is also the overseer of local Leagues, which are distributed in every county within the state. Local Leagues focus much of their attention on the workings of their city governments, including town hall meetings and city planning.

Position statements for local Leagues include those of the state, as well as their own. For example, if a League in Newport conducted a study on the Oregon Coast, their findings are then translated into position statements that allow League volunteers to lobby local governmental entities in support of their newly researched findings. The same is true for national League position.

II. 1920: Formation of the League of Women Voters of Oregon

As one of the first Leagues founded within the United States, the League of Women Voters of Oregon has a long-standing history of affecting change within state politics and education.

Oregon's suffrage movement was successful in granting full rights to women in 1912. As the ninth state in the nation to vote on such an accord, East Coast-based women's political advocacy groups shifted much of their focus to the women's movement in Oregon. The Oregon Equal Suffrage Alliance was founded in 1915 and the National Woman's Party also became an active force within the state a year later. By 1919, many of these organizations were combined into a unified League of Women Voters. The Oregon chapter, predominately more active than other state Leagues, sent representatives to the organization's 1920 National Convention. During this time, general state and national Leagues' objectives were formed.

[I]n June, the governing council of the new League decided to recommend as its first activity a study of state laws having to do with education and the legal

¹ Moore, *By the People: The League of Women Voters of Oregon, 1920-1995*, Salem: The League of Women Voters of Oregon, 1993, p. 15

status of women. That recommendation set the pattern the League was to follow all its life – study first, then action.¹

Oregon's diligence in developing an equal political platform for both men and women

proved an effective model for the new objectives of the national League.

III. A Brief History of the National League

In response to the Women's Suffrage Movement during the early 20th Century, members of the National American Woman Suffrage Association met in St. Louis, Missouri to discuss the future of the American female constituency. The organization's President, Carrie Champan Catt proposed a revolutionary idea to create a women's organization that would further the campaign for women's equality as well as create a system of unified social reform – an organization that would span across the United States.

The foundation of the Women Voters group was then developed in states that had already achieved suffrage, igniting core leaders within each region to develop issue-based

platforms. By February 14, 1920, with Maud Wood Park at the helm as League President,

the League of Women Voters had matured into a formal national organization (the same year as the development of the Oregon League). Initial key issues for the group included citizenship, safety, health, and equitable working conditions.

The National American Women's Suffrage Association, developed before most women's groups, restructured its organizational hierarchy and finally adopted the formal name of the League of Women Voters. By 1946, the League further evolved from a conglomeration of state groups to a nationally-based member organization (in charge of

¹ Moore, Mary Alice and Donald E. Moore. *More Power Than We Knew: The League of Women Voters in Oregon 1920-1995*. Salem: The League of Women Voters of Oregon, 1995. p. 15.

overseeing the work of state and local Leagues). Two key components of the League emerged from its development: education of voters and advocacy for particular positions.

Currently, the League of Women Voters (LWV) encourages volunteer participation within the state and federal legislative branches', while the League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF) is a tax-deductible offset of the organization that facilitates forms of public education, without explicitly containing any form of partisanship or advocacy positions. Each of these factions of the national League is defined by individualized mission statements and key stances on positions. As a non-profit, non-partisan organization, the League of Women Voters of the United States is now a major player within the Congressional political realm. The national LWV organization continues to provide guidance to state and local Leagues, as well as maintain over-arching positions on such topics as campaign finance reform, health care, and social security.

IV. League Mission and Position Statements

The national League traditionally developed a mission statement to embody the main objectives of the organization. The role of this statement is to define the nature of the League in relation to other public interest organizations and also incorporate the similar goals of the national, state, and local Leagues. It asserts that

[t]he League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.²

V. Political Action and the Leagues

In order to maintain the principles and goals of the League's mission statement, many steps must be achieved to facilitate public interest action within a political sphere.

¹ League of Women Voters of Oregon. *LWVOR Statements of Position for Action*. Salem, OR: State Office.

² League of Women Voters. *LWVUS-LWVEF Mission Statement and Core Values*. Washington, DC. p. 1.

In the course of developing an educational or legislative agenda, the League must first propose their interest in a nation-wide or local study pertaining to that certain subject. After consensus is reached upon potential educational studies, members of national, state, and local Leagues are organized to research and write reports upon the agreed-upon subject. When the report has been compiled, it is then sent to experts within the field: academics, policy institutes, and community leaders. These experts (often bi-partisan) proof the paper for clarity and verify the League's attempt to maintain a neutral position within the document. After members have either re-edited or finalized their study, the report is sent to the state board for approval. Once endorsed by the League board, the state organization then adopts a specific position regarding the findings of a study. These positions are finally forwarded to the national office and are kept until revisions are necessary or an updated study improves the nature of the statement.

According to the League of Women Voters of Oregon doctrine, "[e]ach position affirms a basic philosophy in general terms, defines the goals desired, and establishes guidelines against which proposals can be measured."³ In fact, the adopted position statements developed by the League are seen as the core agenda items for the League's advocacy volunteers, who observe and testify at both the state and national legislatures. Approval for lobbying at the legislature is reviewed and voted on by the state board. "For the board, the position is the yardstick against which to measure governmental proposals."⁴

V. Political Action and the League

³ League of Women Voters of Oregon. *LWVOR Statements of Position for Action*. Salem, OR: State Office, 2003. p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Political action, also defined as lobbying, is a strong aspect of the League of Women Voter's success within the Oregon Legislature. Their non-partisan stance, as well as their well-researched positions prompts state Representatives and Senators to respect the opinions of the organization. Political action is thus achieved by the diligent work of the Action Committee. This group, appointed by the state board,

may be involved in many forms of action at the state level, such as testifying before legislative committees, conferring with state officials and agencies, or working with other groups having common interests.⁵

Often, select Action Committee members represent individual positions. Volunteer lobbyist Liz Frankel is active in representing issues involving natural resources and the environment, while Kappy Eaton, who has represented the League at the Legislature for many decades, has an interest in governance and women's issues. League members involved in the Action Committee pay close attention to the legislative website and Capitol postings, both of which list the bills being heard in special committees. Often, these women commute from Eugene, Portland, or Corvallis to represent the League on certain issues pertaining to their field of interest. While in many instances, the LWVOR volunteer lobbyists provide testimony on certain bills, they often sit in on hearings to observe the testimony and maintain a silent force within the conference room.

As a representative of the "public," the League of Women Voters of Oregon attempts to speak for constituents across Oregon who would not normally be able to be informed enough to understand or participate in legislative affairs. Their role as a non-partisan interest group is often overlooked during hearings that feature invited testimony. Repeatedly, private interests are given favor in the Oregon Legislature over non-profit lobbyists. However, the League holds strong in their stance on maintaining open communication between elected

⁵ Ibid.

officials and the public and has provided legislators with suggestions to reform the political system. In the process of their action and advocacy,

[t]he 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 to proposed action, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.⁶

It is because of the many efforts of the League to promote community education, as well as an open legislative process, that this organization garners most of its influence as a public watchdog and educational source.

VI. Local Leagues and Advocacy

Local Leagues are also a key component in achieving a strong momentum of political advocacy. They "may take action on behalf of LWVOR on state advocacy issues by having their president contact their local legislators or other persons at the state level, or by developing letters to the editor."⁷ Other more direct methods of communication aimed at local League members take the form of "action alerts." These brief information bulletins are regularly featured in the League's *Legislative Report* (a twice-monthly newsletter published during legislative sessions). Action Alerts are important to the League's political agenda, because they provide members with key information pertaining to important bills either supported or opposed by the LWVOR. Members may then choose to contact their representatives and voice their opinion upon the subject. Although many state and local League members do assist in advocacy, general members predominately volunteer their time for educational reports.

⁶ League of Women Voters. "Final Legislative Report: 1999 Legislative Session." *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 1999. p. 2.

⁷ Ibid.

VII. League of Women Voter's Education Fund

Predominately, the educational reports created by the LWVOREF focus on contemporary issues pertaining to state-wide natural resource dilemmas, governmental affairs, social issues, and reform. Currently, the League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund is conducting two studies: homeless youth and judicial independence (which will be published earlier next year). Great care is taken by authors of these studies to provide a neutral approach to each topic. According to the League's national office, "[o]ver the years, LWV has built up high recognition value and trust by providing citizens accurate, nonpartisan services and information on elections and on governmental issues."⁸ As the educational division of the League, the LWVEF and LWVEFOR are separate from the political action aspect of the organization. Donations for this division are tax deductible and these educational materials are directed to the public. In their *2003-2005 Biennial Report*, Margaret Noel, the state League President, reported a growth in distribution of League educational materials to the community, due to a substantial increase in tax deductible donations to the Education Fund. She writes,

[o]ver the past eight years, growth of our Education Fund has led to an exciting expansion of our outreach to more and more citizens. The LWV has long been recognized for our careful, thorough, nonpartisan research on government and election issues.⁹

While reports regularly focus on social issues, voter service is also an important aspect of the educational goals of the League. Voter service includes information on registering to vote, voter's rights, candidate information, as well as the development of statewide student mock elections. The League's *Voter's Guide*, now with a distribution of nearly half a million copies statewide, provides voters with the pros and cons of specific ballot measures as well

⁸ League of Women Voters. *In League*. Washington D.C., 2002.

⁹ League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund. *2003-2005 Biennial Report*. Salem, Oregon: 2005. p. 1.

as nonpartisan descriptions of candidates. Within the past five years, various versions of the League's signature *Voter's Guide* have evolved, in an attempt to incorporate a handful of voter minorities. Guides are now written in Spanish and Russian, while audio and vision-impaired adaptations have also been created to assist voters with disabilities.

The nature of the two League divisions is often mistakenly combined by reporters and citizens. According to the national organization,

[i]t is particularly important for us to distinguish between educational services and action. This is not always easy to do. For example, LWV efforts to improve the administration of election laws come under the category of citizen information. However, working to enact new election laws or to change existing ones is lobbying, taking legislative action under League positions. Such action is not considered to be citizen information activity.¹⁰

Distinct efforts to improve the citizen, press, and legislative awareness of the two separate branches of the League have bolstered both citizens' interest in the League's educational reports, as well as fundraising efforts. The fact that the Education Fund is tax deductible woos many potential donors who are wary of contributing to the advocacy portion of the League. Also, news media such as newspapers and local town newsletters are now featuring selections from the League's *Voter's Guides* as a public service to their readers. The expansion of the internet has also bolstered attention directed at the League, as state and local chapters now post their reports on the web. While technology, education, and advocacy continue to develop within the organization, specific goals must be attained to keep the historical spirit of the League alive. One of these goals is membership, while the other objectives include the retention and incorporation of a younger generation of constituents, as well as male members.

¹¹ Noel, Margaret. Personal Interview. 29 Apr. 2006.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Maddex, Ellen. Personal Interview. 6 Feb. 2006.

¹⁰ League of Women Voters. *In League*. Washington D.C., 2002.

VIII. Membership

Currently, the League of Women Voters of Oregon consists of a strong core of retired, highly-educated women. Although men are also accepted into the organization, only one is a member of the State Board and the male membership within the Oregon League is less than ten percent of the entire volunteer structure. As the League progresses, much concern has been raised regarding soliciting future members and maintaining their interest in the group. According to the League's state President Margaret Noel, "there is an assumption that we are much bigger than we are."¹¹ Over the past ten years, membership has maintained a relatively steady rate; however interest from both men and youth is poor. While one-tenth of the membership consists of males, the percentage of high school or college-aged students that apply for membership is slim to none in local Leagues.¹² According to many members, the current theme of weekend recreation and outdoor pursuits has also hampered the service aspect of the LWVOR. According to League member Ellen Maddex, "it is harder and harder every year to find members who want to volunteer."¹³ As with volunteer organizations, a certain level of commitment is expected from each member. Liz Frenkel, the League's key environmental lobbyist, believes that a lack of interest in new membership from the relatively younger generation is directly correlated to the current social culture. She states,

[f]or example, I was a young mother in the 70's with two kids and I wanted to do something that made a difference. I also did not have a job. That is not true anymore. There was a great deal during the 70's coming out of a cultural revolution in a sense – that people thought they ought to be doing good things and I'm not sure that's a cultural feeling right now. You almost have to teach it.¹⁴

¹¹ Noel, Margaret. Personal Interview. 29 Apr. 2006.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Maddex, Ellen. Personal Interview. 6 Feb. 2006.

¹⁴ Frenkel, Liz. Personal Interview. 29 April 2006.

Many steps have been taken by the League to improve their conditions within membership. Primarily, Margaret Noel and the current League Board have voted unanimously to change the League's name from the League of Women Voters of Oregon to the League of Voters of Oregon¹⁵. Although she understands that there may be a slight transition in marketing the new moniker, she believes it is in the League's best interest to incorporate both men and women into the spheres of education and advocacy. Noel concludes that the League's main goal is organizing the structure of the non-profit in order to become more inclusive. The act of including more social subgroups within the League also plays a direct role in modeling to legislators and other organizations, that the public interest should be its first priority in political incorporation. Within the last five years, the Oregon State Legislature has had a poor history of public notification of key legislation as well as a relatively overall closed-door policy. Therefore, the League of Women Voters of Oregon has tracked the status of the Legislature closely and reported on such issues.

IX. Legislative Reports

During Oregon Legislative sessions, the League of Women Voters of Oregon publishes a semi-monthly report featuring current information on bills, resolutions, and action. The document, primarily authored by the members of the Action Committee and the League President, incorporates educational information and explanations of important legislation. These reports also monitor the progress of bills and provide insight into positions that the League supports or opposes within specific realms of Oregon politics. Major

¹⁵ Although agreed upon by the state board, the LWVOR must approve their name change with the national League. Oregon, 1999, p. 1.

contributors include Kappy Eaton, Liz Frenkel, Paula Krane, Margaret Noel, as well as lobbyists who specialize in specific fields such as mental health or K-12 education.

Distribution of the *Legislative Report* has grown exponentially after the posting of .html and .pdf versions on the internet. Not only does the League save money on the high cost of mailings, they are also able to reach a larger audience through the global community of the World Wide Web. Now, students, teachers, and other community members are able to access this information without being a paid member of the League. The information pertaining to the past four legislative sessions (as featured below) are all a product of the League of Women Voter's *Sine Die Legislative Report*. This document, written as a review of the year's most important bills and progress of member action, provides the most information pertaining to the League's activities during that year.

X. Oregon's 70th Legislative Session: Summer 1999

During the 1999 State Legislature, the main goal of the League was to publicize the specific positions of the organization in relation to proposed legislation at the state Capitol in Salem. In the wake of the student shootings at Thurston and Littleton High Schools, gun control was a main issue on the legislative agenda. However, many issues such as child care and education were relatively neglected. According to the League's *Sine Die Legislative Report*, "formal testimony was presented to committees or during hearings on 40 bills."¹⁶ Lobbying for the League was organized through their Action Committee, which composed of about 17 members. Volunteers would attend specific hearings between January and July, focusing their attention on such issues as campaign finance reform and the environment. In

¹⁶ League of Women Voters. "Final Legislative Report: 1999 Legislative Session." *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 1999. p. 1.

review, the primary goal of the Action Committee is to evaluate “matters before the Legislature within the framework of the League (both state and national) positions, clearing testimony and other materials to reflect these positions accurately, and coordinating with each other.”¹⁷ Aside from statewide lobbying practices, the League also focused their efforts on maintaining communication between the state office and local Leagues. The distribution of the League’s 1999 *Legislative Report* was instrumental in motivating local League members to contact their local and state Representatives. “Action Alerts” were also issued to individuals within the League and distributed via e-mail. These messages would inform members of important legislative issues and encourage individuals to participate in local action. For example, during the 70th legislative session, members of the Legislature proposed bills to alter the Oregon initiative process. HJR 21, which was supported by the League, would increase the amount of signatures needed to place an initiative on a statewide ballot. Another resolution, SJR 21 attempted to limit the “subject matter of initiative constitutional amendments.”¹⁸ Both of these documents were passed by the House and Senate and were referred to voters in May. While the League focused on many areas of interest, Liz Frenkel spent most of her time targeting specific environmental issues. According to Ms. Frenkel, LWVOR natural resources legislative strategy for 1999 was to target land use issues. Our major concerns were bills that would:

- Weaken the authority of the Department of Land Conservation and Development;
- Exempt local government from statewide land use planning goals, statutes or rules;
- Weaken statewide land use planning goals; and

¹⁶ League of Women Voters. “Final Legislative Report: 1999 Legislative Session.” *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 1999. p. 10.

¹⁷ Ibid. Oregon: 1999. p. 12.

¹⁸ League of Women Voters. “Final Legislative Report: 1999 Legislative Session.” *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 1999. p. 8.

played a • Preempt local government authority to enact more restrictive or more protective ordinances than those required by the legislature¹⁹

Although many of the bills proposed either died in committee, or were vetoed by the governor, some legislation such as HB 2419 passed, allowing less regulation in regards to aggregate mining operations.

Also signed by the Governor was a successful win for women's issue lobbyists.

Kappy Eaton, who represents the League in both governance and women's issues campaigns, supported SB 588, which "continued insurance coverage for mammograms and gynecological exams."²⁰ One surprising move by the Legislature pertained to the issue of abortion. According to Eaton "[f]or the first time this decade, anti-choice legislation passed the Legislature."²¹ HB 2633 would have "mandated parental notification when a teen seeks an abortion."²² Although many heated debates took place on the floor of both committee chambers, the bill was ultimately vetoed by Governor Kitzhaber.

XI. Oregon's 71st Legislative Session: Summer 2001

The 71st Oregon legislative session was over-shadowed by extreme partisan tactics when the Democrat and Republican parties attempted to restructure the Oregon Legislative and Congressional voter districts. House Democrats held a protest against Republicans who attempted to create new districts in their favor. The walkout lasted ten days and created strong partisan tension. According to the 2001 Action Chair Paula Krane, "term limits

¹⁹ League of Women Voters. "Final Legislative Report: 1999 Legislative Session." *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 1999. p. 10.

²⁰ League of Women Voters. "Final Legislative Report: 1999 Legislative Session." *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 1999. p. 12.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

played a detrimental role” in determining legislation throughout this session. In the 2001, in *League Sine Die Legislative Report*, she stated that “[t]he large number of inexperienced legislators serving this session again played a considerable role in the ineffectiveness of the session and mistakes made due to immaturity and lack of leadership experience.”²³ The House Republicans’ attempts in gerrymandering proved unsuccessful after the strong backlash from Oregon Democrats and the Secretary of State. In a personal interview, Paula recalled that “the League had been watching the whole redistricting process and to make sure that the final plan was fair and equal.”²⁴ Their presence within the Legislature assisted in the reconvening of the House Representatives, although the issues of redistricting has still not been resolved.

XII. Oregon As with the many obstacles that public interest groups and non-profit organizations face at the Capitol, the League was often hindered in providing testimony due to the many hearings which featured invited testimony.

Many bills that LWVOR either supported or opposed had one hearing. . . at which the Committee Chair announced that a “stake holder” group would be assembled to draft a consensus bill. LWVOR, representing the public (not a “stake holder”), was seldom invited to these meetings.²⁵

In terms of natural resource legislation, League lobbyist Liz Frenkel focused her attentions on substantial bills pertaining to land use and pollution. SB 764, which extended pollution tax credits until 2007, was opposed by the League. However, it passed in both the House and Senate, finally being approved by the Governor. HB 2460 was also passed and signed into law. This bill, which protected citizens from “frivolous lawsuits inhibiting public

²³ League of Women Voters. “Sine Die Legislative Report.” *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 2001. p. 2.

²⁴ Krane, Paula. Personal Interview. 29 April 2006.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

participation”²⁶ was strongly supported by League lobbyists. Frenkel cites her difficulties in lobbying for environmental reform because of the private interests of such groups as the small business associations and the farming community. She believes that, farmers are another big industry who are scared to death of people like the Sierra Club or even the League when we are worried about pesticides or reporting and so on, on the other hand they recognize land use planning, which is a major League plank as protecting their industry.²⁷

The importance of environmental issues, such as clean water, free-flowing rivers, and land use planning were also issues brought up during this session – a repeating pattern seen in almost legislative convening. However, the diligent efforts of League lobbyists made a dramatic impact on political proposals at Salem’s Capitol, during the 71st legislative session.

XII. Oregon’s 72nd Legislative Session: Summer 2003

Fiscal policy was the main focus for the League during this year. In the *Sine Die Legislative Report* for this year, lobbyist Kappy Eaton expressed her concern with the many implications of fiscal reform within the House and Senate.

Although the plight of citizens losing their social services and the funding difficulties for all levels of public education were articulated repeatedly in the Capitol, the Legislature itself seemed strangely isolated from the reality of Oregon’s critical fiscal condition.²⁸

Eaton continued her remarks upon the dealings of the Legislature commenting on the disorganization and personal priorities of certain legislators.

Almost every day brought new lows for the state regarding hunger, poverty, education funding, and bond ratings. It also brought introductions of seemingly extraneous bills, more tax credits, and increasing numbers of hearings with only invited testimony and behind-the-scenes work groups.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

²⁷ Frenkel, Liz. Personal Interview. 29 April 2006.

²⁸ League of Women Voters. “Sine Die Legislative Report.” *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 2003. p. 1.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 9.

The taxation system in Oregon is based on two forms of revenue: the property and the income tax. The League's fiscal lobbyist Kappy Eaton believes that "[f]or more than a decade, economists, League Members, and many others interested in revising the Oregon tax system, have been attempting to move the discussion forward."³⁰ Many lobby groups, including the League, have insisted in re-examining the benefits of a third type of taxation: the sales tax. The inclusion of this tax, nicknamed the "third leg" by legislators and lobbyists, has been repeatedly defeated by Oregon voters.

In order to re-define Oregon's financial state, the House Revenue Committee met to examine 28 hours of testimony, as observed by over 200 participants. Although strong debate and various suggestions pertaining to the growth of state revenue were devised, House Speaker Karen Minnis limited further hearings. At the end of the 2003 legislative cycle, HJR 42 was composed. This resolution created a 20-member "Task Force on Tax Reform," including a fairly equal distribution of Republicans and Democrats. In her written commentary featured in the League's 2003 *Sine Die Legislative Report*, Ms. Eaton states that "[t]he League will monitor the task force and present testimony at public hearings, as well as working with other groups to ensure that something emerges from this effort."³¹ The secretive nature of state legislative affairs was a continuing concern for the League.

In a commentary entitled "On the Fringe," Paula Krane expressed her disbelief at the unwelcoming nature of the Capitol. "[A]ll but two doors into the Capitol were locked from the very beginning. From there we saw more and more problems with allowing concerned citizens access to the public process."³² Many other problems persisted, including invited rather than public testimony, work groups without public hearings, and less-than-an-hour

³⁰ League of Women Voters. "Sine Die Legislative Report." *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 2003. p. 2.

³¹ Ibid. p. 3.

³² Ibid. p. 9.

advance notice for hearings (instead of the suggested 24-hour minimum). According to Krane, “[t]here were times when Action Committee members attended hearings prepared to testify but were not allowed the opportunity.”³³ The notion of a “citizen’s legislature” which has been historically suggested by Oregon’s League of Women Voters was dramatically privatized. Not only was the notification or access to testimony limited, budget notes also skirted traditional public legislative input.

XIII. In the budget committees, budget notes (which in effect become legislation) were written into the budget by the Ways and Means Co-chairs. Even the members of the budget committees had no say on these, and when the budget was voted on by the Legislature there was no discussion of these budget notes. This was legislation without public input.³⁴

Kappy Eaton agreed with the comments regarding covert or privatized practices at the Legislature during the 2003 session. She was quoted as summarizing the governance issues as the famous movie titles, “Much Ado About Nothing,” “Liar, Liar,” and even jokingly a “Midsummer’s Nightmare.”³⁵ In response to the legislative chaos, few governance measures actually passed. Many factors pertained to the mismanagement of legislative progress. “The number of bills introduced but never heard, or voted only by one house, or gutted and stuffed, or passed in the flurry of adjournment are legion.”³⁶ Other themes pertaining to governance, like campaign finance reform, included legislation that would allow less stringent measures for gift-giving by lobbyists. The proposed HB 3328 was created to give lobbyists unlimited access to legislators and their families in terms of gifts and trips.

The League of Women Voters of Oregon and a financial watchdog lobbying organization entitled MiPRAP worked closely to redefine the terms of the legislation. Ms.

³³ Ibid. p. 10.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid.

Eaton writes, “[w]ith our floor letter which was quoted extensively, we managed to change 25 votes in the House, although it passed the House 32-27 on the second try (original vote 58-2),”³⁷ Although the bill was finally defeated with Governor Kulongoski’s veto, the League still continued to educate legislators on the importance of reforming the rules and regulations on lobby gifts.

XIII. 2004: Funding Oregon Study

Following a hectic legislative year, the League publicized their new study on Oregon fiscal policy. After nearly two years of study, the League of Women Voters of Oregon’s Education Fund developed a financial guide entitled *Funding Oregon: The Ins and Outs of State Finance*. This document was designed to translate the complicated language of state financial issues into lay terms, a prized document in the wake of 2003’s legislative session pertaining to the same topic. The guide was originally distributed to libraries, legislators, and members of the Oregon League. However, the League received a \$5,000 grant from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund to widen its distribution audience. According to a local newspaper, the *Newport News Times*, “[p]ublicity about ‘Funding Oregon’ will be tied to tax day on April 15 and to the budget discussions taking place in the Legislature and in cities and towns throughout Oregon.”³⁸ In an overview of the report, the abstract states that it “explains what taxes and fees you pay, how that money is used, and options for tax reform.”³⁹ Walter Barkan, editor of the report was adamant on maintaining a neutral stance on finance issues. In his interview with the *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, he states, “[w]e don’t want to mix politics

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Grant will help League of Women Voters distribute state finance guide.” *Newport News Times*. 23 March 2005.

³⁹ League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund. *Funding Oregon: The Ins and Outs of State Finance*. Salem, OR: LWVOR Ed Fund, 2004.

with facts.”⁴⁰ The success and widespread audience of the report spawned public forums across the state. During the 2004 statewide council meeting for the League, a consultant for Governor Kulongoski attended a panel, speaking on successful methods of funding for Oregon schools. The transition between the previous legislative session and the 2005 session was marked by the successful public distribution of the League’s *Funding Oregon* report. However, for the next legislative session, the League of Women Voters of Oregon shifted their interest to the Capitol’s need for open, public access.

XIV. Oregon’s 73rd Legislative Session: Summer 2005

During this most recent legislative year, fifteen League volunteers committed their time to lobby on various issues. The team met every other week, discussing priorities and action goals. The organization then took many steps to increase their visibility in lobbying for a greater public access at the State Capitol, including:

face-to-face lobbying, issuing press releases, writing letters to the editor, distributing floor letters to legislators on the day of voting, testifying in committee hearings, participating in committing work groups, or sending action alerts to local League members.⁴¹

In 2005, the League of Women Voters of Oregon also led a new campaign to improve the conditions of the legislative agenda within Salem. Major and minor infractions, which had been taking place over the past few sessions, were impeding political process, as well as the ability for members of the public to testify on their own behalf.

After many sessions of watching the erosion of public access to the legislative process, the League of Women Voters of Oregon decided to make this issue a

⁴⁰ Waldrop, Becky. “Public financing 101: What does the tax money buy?” *Corvallis Gazette-Times*. Feb. 2004. p. 3.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 4. *Personal Interview*. 29 April 2006.

priority and work toward positive change.⁴²

Upon review, the League Board and members of the Action Committee created a list of four components of reform that members of the Legislature and Capitol staff should voluntarily adopt. These included:

1. At least 48 hours notice should be given for committee hearings and should include an accurate list of bills to be heard. Currently only 24 hours notice is required, but is frequently abused, and often the list of bills being heard is changed at the last minute.
2. Members of the public should be the first group of people to testify at a hearing; invited and agency testimony should come afterward. No citizen should be turned away from testifying
3. Work groups (appointed to reconcile various opinions on a bill) should be balanced so that all views are heard. At present members are chosen solely at the discretion of the committee chair. Each work group's report should have a hearing.
4. Budget notes should not be included in the budget without a full hearing. Budget notes frequently include important restrictions or instructions on how budget moneys are spent and are often added by the chairs of Ways and Means Committees, without agencies or other legislators being aware of what the notes say and without any public hearing.⁴³

Initial success of the League was shown by newspaper articles featuring the open-door policy proposed by the LWVOR, as well as 48-hour notice by House Leader Karen Minnis. Paula Krane, an active League member, also believes the League's voter education efforts pertaining to budget notes were also successful. She claims, "[w]e brought up the issue of budget notes, now everyone is starting to look at them."⁴⁴ Citizen access was also an important issue within the Capitol. "There were some committee chairs who picked and chose from the people who signed up to testify. . . The public itself was left out of a lot of

⁴² League of Women Voters. "The Legislative Report." *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 28 January 2003. p. 1.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 3.

⁴⁴ Krane, Paula. Personal Interview. 29 April 2006.

testimony.”⁴⁵ Often, testimony of invited lobbyists would last three or more hours, leaving little time for public input. Ms. Krane’s response for limiting public is a reflection of many Legislators’ priorities. “Most legislators don’t go into this wanting to learn more about something.”⁴⁶ However, state Representatives and Senators did begin to mimic the League’s suggestions and minor victories for the organization were achieved, especially in the area of public access.

As with political reform, 2005 was a year of great technological progress within the state League. Individualized action alerts continued to be sent members across Oregon via e-mail, *Legislative Reports* were posted on their website in .pdf form, and the League’s volunteer lobbyists tracked legislation at a more productive rate online.

In her column in 2005’s *Legislative Report*, Marge Easley, Chair of the Action Coordinating Committee, wrote that although the League was taking a giant step into the world of technology, it would still maintain a personal role within the Legislator and between its members. “[C]omputers are no substitute for the most important job the Action Team performs – interacting on a personal level to change minds, forge alliances, and work toward the common good.”⁴⁷ In terms of alliances, the Oregon League joined the Women’s Health and Wellness Alliance and the Pro-Choice Coalition. Both groups work with legislators to promote advancements in women’s health, child care, domestic violence support, and advocacy.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ League of Women Voters. “The Legislative Report.” *Legislative Report*. Salem, Oregon: 28 January 2003. p. 1

XV. 2006: Awards and Honors

After the last legislative session, the League of Women Voters of Oregon, as well as the League's Education Fund, have both gained much attention from the media for their Capitol reform policies. This year, the LWVOR Office has garnered many awards and honors. The *Statesman Journal*, a news publication based in Salem, named the League as one of the many organizations within the state this is a "positive force for diversity."⁴⁸ The League, as well as other agencies, was honored for their multi-lingual *Voters Guides* as well as their political action sympathetic to Oregon minorities.

During May, the Oregon's Secretary of State Bill Barbury awarded the Education Fund with recognition for the League's "Outstanding Leadership in Voter Education."⁴⁹ The award pertained to the organizations effort in youth voter education and the Oregon Student Mock Election sponsored by the League that took place statewide during November of 2004. In impressive 40,000 Oregon students participated in the event, which featured live telecasts from governmental officials, high schools, and college representatives. Also, in conjunction with the League's education and advocacy awards, former League President Paula Krane was selected as a *Corvallis Gazette-Times* Woman in Achievement. She was one of five women selected and recognized by the OSU Women's Center. An article in the Corvallis newspaper, entitled "Leader is from a special league" features an interview with Ms. Krane in which she states, "I don't care how you vote. Just make sure that when you make that vote, you're doing so from an informed position, not just an emotional gut reaction or what your spouse

⁴⁸ Davis, Alex. "More groups or places that embrace diversity." *Statesman Journal*. 23 March 2003.

⁴⁹ Oregon Secretary of State. "Speeches, News and Testimony." Oregon: State Executive Office, 2005.

tells you.”⁵⁰ In keeping with the merits of the League, Ms. Krane re-enforces her emphasis on personal education when referring to politics.

After reviewing the significant achievements of the League, many questions arise pertaining to the future strength of the organization. First, if the League is so successful within the Legislature and receives ample amount of press coverage, why has it not increased in membership turnout? Who should the League turn to for volunteer support? And will the League survive as a public interest organization in the future?

In order to answer these questions, one must first examine the archetypal League volunteer.

XVI. Interviews: Personal Perspectives of the League

While examining the history and methods of the League, I was interested in understanding the personal reasons why certain League members – especially those with present or prior leadership experience – chose to join and continue their membership with the League of Women Voters of Oregon. Although retention rates of membership remains relatively constant with current League members, recruiting new and diverse Oregon voters is often difficult.

Two aspects of current society have affected the slow decline of League membership. Civic volunteerism has nearly evaporated and the amount of women staying in the homes has decreased exponentially. However, it is exactly these two characteristics that have assisted the women in current leadership roles to develop their long-term relationship with the League.

⁵⁰ Albright, Mary Ann. “Leader is from a special league.” *The Corvallis Gazette-Times*. 24 Apr. 2006.

In determining whom to contact for interviews, I decided to select three members with a variety of skill levels in both lobbying and educational backgrounds. Both Liz Frenkel and Paula Krane have extensive experience in political action and League leadership. Their efforts throughout the duration of their membership have impacted both the state and local Leagues that they participate in. Ellen Maddex, although sporadically active in the state affairs, contributes to the Eugene League and volunteers for League research studies. Ms. Maddex provides a different perspective on League affairs, since she is currently predominately active in local (not statewide) activities. Both Liz and Paula's interviews were conducted via phone and recorded on a digital voice recorder, while I met Ellen at her home for a personal interview. The following three sections outline the basis of the three interviews.⁵¹

XVII. Liz Frenkel

Ms. Frenkel graduated college with a Bachelor of Arts in History from Stanford University. While in California, she would regularly take monthly trips to the National Conservation Committee's meetings in San Francisco and educate herself about environmental issues. While participating with the Conservation Committee, she met her future husband and moved to Corvallis, where he worked as a university professor. Liz decided to join the local League of Women Voters after having two children and searching for a creative outlet. She was also active in starting a local Sierra Club chapter and founding Corvallis' first American Civil Liberties Union chapter.

⁵⁰ Frenkel, Liz. Personal Interview, 29 April 2006.

⁵¹ Kappy Eaton, one of the Oregon League's most influential volunteer lobbyists was unavailable for an interview.

In the political realm, Liz began volunteering with the Oregon Environmental Council, working on statewide projects. Her interest in natural resources was then polished when lobbying both statewide and federally. She remembers issues including the preservation of the Oregon Coast and Columbia George, while attempting to maintain a dam-free Upper Klamath. As a volunteer for the League of Women Voters of Oregon, Frenkel spends a majority of her time attempting to preserve waterways. She states, "oddly enough, even though I have never actually been on a river trip, I probably spend a very large portion of my lobby life to preserve free flowing rivers."⁵² Although Liz is successful in many of her causes, she sometimes runs into political friction. She claims that lobbyists often enter negotiation with the mindset of "them versus us," giving the examples of small business lobbyists and industry representatives. Frenkel believes that "if they have run into you before, and they have lost, then you are the enemy."⁵³ She does not understand the mindset of some lobbyists who are unable to create relations with non-profit, public interest organizations and who have the "whole mindset that economic development is automatically the antithesis of natural resource preservation."⁵⁴ When asked how successful she thinks the League of Women Voters of Oregon is at influencing the state Legislature, she believes that much of the success depends on the issue. For example, she explains

Oregon is a heavy timber state and up until probably the late 80's there was absolutely no way, really, that you could be affective in lobbying if you were in opposition to a position – or worse – proposing a position opposed by the timber industry. Now, it is somewhat different – [a] shift in the economics in the state. There is a lot more concern now for clean water. . . . A large number of the timber industry opposed Measure 37. . . . to a certain extent, they saw land use as protecting their industry.⁵⁵

⁵² Frenkel, Liz. Personal Interview. 29 April 2006.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Ellen. Personal Interview. 6 Feb. 2006.

After volunteering as a Lobbyist since 1989, Ms. Frenkel has observed the evolution of the Oregon League. Although she recognizes that the organization has not grown in terms of members, she believes that it has increased in visibility as well as efficiency. "You just look at the number of *Voters Guides* that comes out. That's quantifiable."⁵⁶ She also comments on the interest in news outlets to the opinions of the League.

I think the League at the legislature right now is highly respected for an interesting reason and that is because as the legislature has become flabbier and shabbier in terms of the way they handle their public relations, everyone doesn't trust them and the League two years ago began its public access program and the timing was right. We gets calls from reporters when there is any ever question of public access and this has been a very good relation for us.

Liz's extensive work at the Legislature has included countless hours of testimony, observation, as well as time commuting from Corvallis to Salem. Her efforts are respected, even revered, by many members of the League of Women Voters of Oregon.

XVIII. Ellen Maddex

Ellen Maddex joined the League as a graduate student forty years ago. Her fascination with the organization spawned from her attraction to legislative affairs. She states, "I have always been interested in government and politics."⁵⁷ Ellen moved to Oregon in her mid-twenties and participated more in anti-war activities than the League. However, after a few years she began to host a League home unit at her residence as well as facilitate issues luncheons. Such events would bring community League members together to discuss current events and specific LWVOR positions. In Eugene, Ellen has participated in local

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Maddex, Ellen. Personal Interview. 6 Feb. 2006.

studies, as well as volunteer as the Arrangements Chair for the State Board. When speaking about the League, Ms. Maddex is extremely passionate. When talking about the effectiveness of the organization, she states:

I think in many ways we are very effective when we speak about something. Most elected officials realize we know what we are talking about because we study it. We are known to be non-partisan . . . we do not have anything to do with candidates.⁵⁸

Ellen also believes that the League's efforts in the Legislature are respected by Oregon House and Senate members. The volunteer aspect of the Action Committee defines the role of the League at the state Capitol.

We have had paid lobbyists here, but the League does not have a whole lot of money. It is not easy to find money and it is not easy to find volunteers. We have found in general that our volunteer lobbyists knew the material better than those who are paid . . . Legislators realize that people like Kappy Eaton and Liz Frenkel know what they are talking about.⁵⁹

Ms. Maddex's belief that the League of Women Voters of Oregon makes an impact on legislation is also shared by past League President Paula Krane.

XIX. Paula Krane

Paula began her career as a high school teacher after obtaining a BA in history and political science, as well as a Masters degree in education. After moving to Corvallis, she had difficulty finding a job, so she began volunteering her time with a local League branch. There, she joined numerous committees and participated in a variety of studies. She believes that the statewide organization "is not as strong today as it was thirty-five years ago. I think part of it is because there were more women at home so we were a larger number and we

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

could have a stronger presence.”⁶⁰ Paula also comments on the overall nature of the Legislature as pertaining to a non-profit organization such as the League.

I think that people being elected to public office go in with pre-formed ideas of how they're going to vote and what they are going to do. And I don't think any group has as strong an influence. I think money plays a bigger part in everything.⁶¹

Paula also recalls a time when the League requested candidates to sign a form to “agree to run a fair campaign.” This pledge outlined several guidelines for the candidate; however the League had no method of enforcement. Ultimately, when the contract was infringed by a signer, reporters were quick to ask the League what method of retaliation the organization had planned. Ms. Krane stated that the group “had no legal recourse if they didn't follow it. If one candidate did not follow through with his pledge, it would be up for the voters to decide.”⁶² Paula believes that the extent to which the League attempts to inform the Oregon public must be grasped and processed by the constituency. While Paula Krane provided information through a personal interview, she also contributed facts about the League of Women Voters of Oregon through an e-mail survey.

XX. Survey

While the personal interview provided a more public-interest perspective on the League and its members, other general questions pertaining to the organization are also relevant in understanding the workings and success of the LWVOR. E-mails were sent out to Committee Heads, Board Members, and League lobbyists active in the state branch, including five general questions. Three responses were returned via e-mail by former Action

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. Marge. E-mail interview. 25 Feb. 2006.

⁶² Ibid. Paula. E-mail interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

Chair Marge Easley, Paula Krane, and current League President Margaret Noel. Two weeks after the first e-mail, a second e-mail reminder was then re-distributed. Due to time constraints and conflicting vacation schedules of many League members, no further responses were returned. However, the responses of Easley, Krane, and Noel provide substantial insight into the official role of the League, as well as the effectiveness the organization has at achieving its goals – a different approach than the interviews of Frenkel, Maddex, and Krane.

XXI. Survey Responses

Marge Easley: Former LWVOR Action Chair.

Paula Krane: Former League President, Action Chair.

Margaret Noel: Current League President.

QUESTION 1: What is the role of the League of Women Voters of Oregon

Marge Easley: “Our mission statement says it best.”⁶³

Paula Krane: “As I see the role, it is the two parts of our mission – (1) attempting to educate our members and the general public about issues and candidates so that they can play a more active part/role in the political process and (2) for those issues that we have studied and have positions on, we should be educating everyone and that includes elected officials as to why we support those issues in the way we do. . . We can stand for good government!”⁶⁴

Margaret Noel: “Specifically, we study issues that affect the state of Oregon, usually through two-year studies, we provide information to citizens through the publication of our

⁶³ Easley, Marge. E-mail Interview. 25 Feb. 2006.

⁶⁴ Krane, Paula. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

studies, through public forums, through nonpartisan Voters' Guides, through debates and through other citizen education programs like the Oregon Student Mock Election. In addition, we develop advocacy positions through member agreement after our members have studied an issue and use these positions to testify before the state Legislature and state committees and other policy-making governmental bodies. We encourage our members to contact their elected representatives on issues that we believe are important to the future of Oregon and that fit our positions."⁶⁵

Margaret Noel: "In many areas of the state, we are respected for our thoroughness and

QUESTION 2: How do you think the League is represented (or perceived) in state and local governments? Sometimes, we may be perceived as irritating because we persist and keep

working on the issues we believe in. Local and state government agencies, governing bodies

Marge Easley: "I think state and local governments depend on the League to provide common sense observations and informed questions. We hold candidate forums around the state and provide valuable information on ballot measures. Public officials often ask our opinion on important issues. There are always those who view us as a 'pain in the neck' or 'little old ladies', but I think generally we are respected."⁶⁶

Paula Krane: "It really depends on the issues and the communities. Some local Leagues are better than others. All the Leagues (from the national to the local) do a fairly good job of informing the public about candidates and issues on the ballot. Whether they reach *all* the public is questionable. The national and Oregon state Leagues do a good job of advocating for issues that they have priorities to work on each session. In past years, when we had a bigger pool of people willing to volunteer to work in Salem or even DC, we did a much

⁶⁵ Noel, Margaret. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

⁶⁶ Easley, Marge. E-mail Interview. 25 Feb. 2006.

better job of getting our message out. I am not sure we won any more battles than we are now – at least on the state level. The League positions have not always been in the majority with Legislators. In many cases we are usually ahead of an issue – we know it is important before the Legislators are ready to address it. As for local Leagues, most of them are not interested at this time in fighting for our positions – occasionally some issue comes up that interest several people and they will work for some change – especially school funding and land use issues.”⁶⁷

Margaret Noel: “In many areas of the state, we are respected for our thoroughness and nonpartisan approach. We are also respected for our dedication to democracy and citizen participation. Sometimes, we may be perceived as irritating because we persist and keep working on the issues we believe in. Local and state government agencies, governing bodies and committees are usually impressed by our diligence in observing their deliberations and asking to have input.”⁶⁸

QUESTION 3: Is the League more efficient and effective now that it includes male and female members?

Marge Easley: “In my perspective, yes. Although the League began as a direct result of the suffragist movement, we have had male members for over thirty years. Because our name has not reflected this fact, this has been a matter of much League discussion over the years.

⁶⁷ Easley, Marge. E-mail Interview. 25 Feb. 2006.

⁶⁸ Krane, Paula. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

⁶⁸ Noel, Margaret. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

⁶⁷ Krane, Paula. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

⁶⁸ Noel, Margaret. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

Men have had key positions in the League at all levels, although one of our strengths is the fact that women have traditionally had more time to pursue volunteer activities.”⁶⁹

Paula Krane: “I am not sure if it is more efficient – there are efficient males and females as well as inefficient males and females (and in the League I have worked with both). Many male members do not always understand the League way. . . and that can slow up the process. As for effective – I personally have not seen a difference.”⁷⁰

Margaret Noel: “As we increase the diversity of our membership in all ways, male & female, various races, beliefs, ethnicities, etc., we are strengthened by having to incorporate divergent viewpoints and more completely mirroring society.”⁷¹

QUESTION 4: What are the League’s main objectives?

Marge Easley: “The two arms of the League are Voter Service and Action. At the state level, we publish a Voters Guide, oversee student mock elections, actively participate in multiple coalitions on a wide variety of issues, monitor the Legislature and testify on bills that deal with issues on which we have positions, attend hearings and interim committee sessions, and advocate on issues that are important to the League in the areas of governance, natural resources, and social policy.”⁷²

Paula Krane: “See the first question”⁷³

Margaret Noel: “To strengthen democracy, to involve citizens in government, to inform citizens about government and to encourage them to exercise their democratic rights. To

⁶⁹ Easley, Marge. E-mail Interview. 25 Feb. 2006.

⁷⁰ Krane, Paula. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

⁷¹ Noel, Margaret. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

⁷² Easley, Marge. E-mail Interview. 25 Feb. 2006.

⁷³ Krane, Margaret. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

build better, more equitable communities that serve the interests of all citizens, to work toward protecting the environment and social services. Our agenda is pretty diverse, since it is based on 85 years of studying Oregon's government and quality of life."⁷⁴

QUESTION 5: How does the League affect politics?

Marge Easley: "We provide valuable information for voters in our Voters Guides and candidate forums. We write letters to the editor and op-ed pieces and publish and distribute study reports. But one of the most effective things we do is issue action alerts to members who in turn call or send letters or emails to elected officials. We are not shy about letting our elected officials know how we feel about issues we care about."⁷⁵

Paula Krane: "I hope for the good but not always sure. Again, this goes back to our goals and objectives. [By] educating the voter we can hope [that] we get the best candidates elected to office. By watching or monitoring governmental units (elected or appointed) we can guarantee an open and clean process. And by advocating for certain things we can participate in the decision making process and hopefully we [can be] on the winning side."⁷⁶

Margaret Noel: "Through education – publications and forums. And through advocacy: oral testimony, written opinion pieces, communications with elected and appointed officials, alerting our members and the public to issues of concern."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Noel.

⁷⁵ Easley, Marge. E-mail Interview. 25 Feb. 2006.

⁷⁶ Krane, Paula. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

⁷⁷ Noel, Margaret. E-mail Interview. 26 Apr. 2006.

XXII. Conclusion

The views of these three women express the successful nature of the League in outlining clear objectives and positions. The role of the League of Women Voters – as well as the Education Fund – mark significant advances in public interest, media connection, and distribution of materials, action, and information. Since the League is a non-partisan organization, it relies on education and neutrality to inform Oregon constituents. Members of the League hope that reports such as the *Voters Guide* will result in a more informed voter population, as well as a higher rate of citizen participation within state and local politics.

Although the current status of the League is an organization with direct public and political impact, it carries the burden of an elder, senior membership. Thus, visions for the future are unclear. When attempting to envision the League in the next ten years, Liz Frenkel states,

There's a huge [advantage] that the League is volunteer. They can't accuse us for being partisan and because of that it is hard for people who don't like what we are saying to castigate us as they usually do with their opponents, because after all we are volunteers and we aren't doing it for any benefits beyond our beliefs. It gives us a halo, but there is a problem and the problem is, it takes a lot of time and energy.⁷⁸

Time and energy is necessary in an organization such as the League. However, many current leaders within the League of Women Voters of Oregon believe that their membership will be maintained, as the “baby boom” population begins their transition into retirement. “It's not young people who are our greatest source of potential members, it is new retirees.”⁷⁹ The League's success is also dependent on the attitude and loyalty of its members. An intense passion to educate and inform is a common theme within the organization, as specifically seen in the action and leadership of Oregon League President Margaret Noel. Ellen Maddex

⁷⁸ Frenkel, Liz. Personal Interview. 29 April 2006.

⁷⁹ Maddex, Ellen. Personal Interview. 6 Feb. 2006.

agrees. She believes that the League of Women Voters is a premier organization in terms of non-profit, non-partisan political action groups. She concludes, "I think it's the best organization for a good education in government and politics that anyone can get."⁸⁰ Ms.

Maddex's opinions hold true to the League's role within politics. Volunteer for the League and their role as a voice for the public offsets the interests of private lobbyists.

Providing a voice for Oregon's constituency – especially an educated voice based on non-biased research – is the lifeblood of democracy. However, many within the organization worry about the future membership recruitment and volunteer interest within the State Legislature. In a publication written by the state office in 1999, a political cartoon depicts the potential divided outcome of the League, describing its future as either an "Orphan's Child or Mother's Pride."⁸¹ In order to successfully transition the League's objectives into the current society, specific changes must be made.

The League's reliance on civic volunteerism currently requires a substantial time commitment. The growing-materialist nature of the 21st century stresses more career-oriented goals and weekend recreation adventures. Very few political or civic movements today are able to recruit the amount of volunteer participation needed to successfully obtain its goals. During the bi-annual convening of the State Legislature, the very nature of the Oregon League lobbyists' position necessitates a daily obligation at the Capitol or LWVOR state office. One possible solution to this problem may be to create an organized volunteer base that specializes in specific fields of League action. Instead of League lobbyists researching, writing, and delivering their own testimony on specific bills, computer access

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Moore, Mary Alice and Donald E. Moore. *More Power Than We Knew: The League of Women Voters in Oregon 1920-1995*. Salem: The League of Women Voters of Oregon, 1995. p. 71.

should allow remote users to examine Legislative agendas and develop talking points for specific legislation. If members across the state researched and composed such proposals on individualized topics (which would then be e-mailed to League Board members and either approved or denied) volunteer lobbyists would be able to devote more of their time providing testimony and working directly with Legislators than writing and revising their own material - ultimately lessening their overall volunteer commitment in half.

Communication within the local and state networks of the League of Women Voters of Oregon should also dramatically evolve. Considerable commitments on the part of League board members and lobbyists in commuting from Eugene, Corvallis, or Portland to the state office in Salem wastes time. Presumably, most League members are retired and have more time to devote to traveling. However, if the League wants to gain a more diverse membership and volunteer base, conversations should take place remotely through online video conferencing. This form of communication would not only be effective for the Action Committee, but for members who are also interested in assisting with League educational reports, yet are unable to arrange travel time to meet and discuss their findings at the state level.

Although the League of Women Voters of Oregon has made substantial improvements to public access of information via the World Wide Web, more changes should be made to recruit a younger or less politically-driven audience. Media outlets such as blogs, audio webcasts, and photo galleries should be featured on the League's website. Important legislative glossary terms (such as budget notes or gutting-and-stuffing) should also be distributed online and within the community. Public access to this information needs

substantial marketing plans to incorporate instructors of middle and high school classes, as well as political student groups at Oregon's many colleges and universities.

The role of the League of Women Voters of Oregon and their agendas pertaining to advocacy and education must withstand the various social norms threatening the

organization. As a representative of the public interest within the State Legislature, the

League is necessary for democracy to properly function. In order to survive as a political

organization in the future, members and leaders within the LWVOR and LWVOREF must

identify and solve the many challenges facing this non-profit. Issues such as volunteer time

commitments, online communication, and public relations must be in the forefront of League

discussions. In response to the League's worry of becoming either the "Orphan's Child or

Mother's Pride," I believe that substantial renovations to the organization will allow for the

group to develop a newfound influence within state politics and educational programs.

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