



League of Women Voters of the Austin Area

We Support

Local Program

2006-2007

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We Support summarizes the League of Women Voters of the Austin Area (LWVAA) program positions reached by local member study and agreement. The positions are not in order of priority. The LWVAA also acts under positions taken by the national League of Women Voters (LWV) and the League of Women Voters of Texas (LWVTX). Each position allows the League to take action on that area of public policy.

I. Administration of Justice

Adequate counsel for indigents at all court levels and improved training and selection standards for the law enforcement personnel.

II. Austin: Its People and Environment.

Equality of opportunity in employment and housing; well-run community development programs with frequent city government administrative reviews; criteria for an Austin master plan; preservation and development of open space and parks; optimum cable TV services; sustainable programs and policies for environmental preservation, social equity, economic development, and affordable housing.

III. City Government

Form of government. Council-manager form of government based on City Charter; combination of at-large and pure district methods of electing City Council; direct election of the mayor; campaign spending and financial disclosure ordinance mandated by City Charter; impartial board of ethics with independent staff.

Planning, city services, growth management. City Charter Commission to plan for human resources; independent neighborhood groups; cost-benefit analysis as an integral part of the planning process; ongoing public input into long-range planning; coordination and communication between city departments, boards, and commissions; balanced representation of diverse interests on the Planning Commission; a standardized, streamlined, and understandable development process with proper regard for public notification, from developer application to council decision; city involvement with government and private entities in the selective recruitment of businesses in which environmental concerns and employment of Austin's citizens are considered; Smart Growth, the attraction of businesses to the Desired Development Zone and redirection of growth away from environmentally sensitive areas.

Finance. Early setting of council budget priorities; electric utility transfer based primarily on the needs of the utility, including its bonded indebtedness, rather than on city budget needs; an electric rate policy based on the cost of service for each class of user and a goal of 100% relative rate of return for all customer classes.

Business incentives in the Austin area. Criteria for tax abatements or incentives for businesses to locate or expand in the Austin area, if offered by any taxing entities, should address: extent to which the businesses will hire locally; and the amount of in-house or contract training that will be provided for employees at all levels.

Electric deregulation. Consideration by the City Council of all options with regard to the electric utility, including the sale of part or all of the utility and/or merger with other entities, along with continued operation; energy conservation programs that are cost-effective, assist low-income citizens, or encourage new or more efficient technology; greater cost sharing by customers for programs from which they benefit; more operating independence for the electric utility and establishment of a policy-making oversight board for the utility, with the powers of eminent domain, rate making, and bond issuance remaining with the City Council.

Annexation: Full consideration of annexation's fiscal impact on the city before council action; flexibility in the timing based on fiscal, planning, environmental, and social factors; continued use of fees to cover the cost of utility extensions and other capital improvements necessary for new development; municipal utility district homeowner payoff of the district's debt after annexation; strengthened subdivision ordinances covering the city's entire extraterritorial jurisdiction.

Drinking water supply. Regional planning for drinking water supply so that supplies are fairly allocated and water quality is maintained; a voluntary, aggressive treated water conservation plan that should become mandatory only under drought conditions; use of a variety of criteria in evaluating funding proposals for water treatment facilities.

IV. Education

Equality of opportunity. Austin Independent School District (AISD) should have as its goal to meet or exceed state and federal accountability standards for achievement, attendance, and dropout and completion rates in each school in the district, and to reduce the disparity in performance among schools, using fully certified teachers, adequate resources, and community involvement.

At all grade levels in AISD: Strong education through varied curriculum; flexibility for teachers within defined curriculum; incentive-based compensation plan for all qualified teachers and campus administrators; appropriate textbooks, technology, and materials; full-time librarians in each school; active parental involvement; year-round schools; flexible learning environments, as in nontraditional schools and alternative learning centers; and programs to help English Language Learners speak English fluently and to provide support services for their parents.

AISD elementary. Grouping of mixed academic ability within a classroom, using ability grouping in math and reading and frequent reevaluation.

AISD secondary. Efficient use of counselor skills; an honors program with weighted grades; challenging academic courses; courses geared to current workforce needs; use of demonstrated competencies to assess student progress; academies or magnet programs with flexible eligibility criteria; scheduling extra-curricular activities during nonschool hours as much as possible; a tech-prep system that prepares students

for the workforce or secondary education; job training courses; and apprenticeship or internship programs.

Preparation for employment. Austin Community College (ACC) and AISD should give students marketable skills through a curriculum relevant to the work world; student problem-solving skills; career exploration, assessment, and counseling before high school enrollment; staff development in teaching techniques and making the curriculum relevant; a centrally located career planning and placement center; employer involvement; staff searches for outside funding sources, internships, and mentors; and adequate funding, including increased taxes as state support declines.

Career preparation in ACC. Coordinate education paths between high school and college work; offer education- and employer-supervised apprenticeships and internships; provide access to state-of-the-art technology; and communicate changing workforce needs to instructional staff, counselors, and students.

Adult education. Strengthened education programs in ACC and AISD Community Schools.

V. Environmental Quality

Solid waste. Long-range planning; use of methods to reduce the volume of waste, including recycling and reuse; and improvement of our present sanitary landfill program.

Energy. Conservation.

Water. An underground water district for the Austin region of the Edwards Aquifer; properly maintained and enforced structural and nonstructural (density) controls to protect water supplies; vigorous enforcement of water quality ordinances and laws by city and county officials.

Wastewater/municipal utility districts (MUDS). The 120-day MUD review process after full documentation is received by the city; regular, formal communication between the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the city; extension of utility lines through revenue rather than contract bonds; regional sewage treatment rather than numerous small package plants; prohibition of sewage discharge or land treatment over aquifer recharge areas; advanced wastewater treatment following cost-benefit analysis.

Air quality. See transportation position.

VI. Health.

City and county medical assistance program qualifications adjusted to 150% of the poverty level; sliding-scale payments for health care for the near-poor; neighborhood clinics that provide primary and preventive health care; a single or multicounty health care district (hospital district) that provides care to indigent people of Travis County, that is financed by a property or sales tax, and that has either an appointed or elected board; contractual agreements with cities and other governmental entities for health care delivery to non-Austin residents; local government public education on the socioeconomic and health factors relating to AIDS.

VII. Library.

A library system for Austin and the surrounding area that includes both traditional library services and modern information management with adequate funding (including a tax increase); community activities and meeting rooms; an adequate security system; and greater communication and cooperation between the schools and libraries. Building more libraries, first in underserved areas, and second, in newly

developed areas or as large regional libraries. Funding for new technology and replacing rented facilities; and for the use of Austin libraries by people who do not live in Austin, providing that these individuals or their communities give financial support.

VIII. Transportation. A balanced, intermodal transportation system (cars, buses, light rail, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian and bicycle routes, shuttles, and special transit) that serves the population as a whole, is publicly owned, efficient, economical, and educates the public on its use; a permanent mass transit authority and a one-cent sales tax to support it; increased opportunities for meaningful citizen participation in the planning process; optimum cooperation and coordination in the administration, planning, and delivery of services among agencies that perform transportation services; ongoing independent performance reviews of those agencies by the Austin Transportation Study; and integration of land-use planning and mixed-use development with transportation planning and goals.

Air quality. Measures that will help the Austin metropolitan area meet federal air quality standards, including car pools, vanpools, buses, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, bicycles, trip reduction, walking, conversion to natural gas and more refueling centers, recharge centers for electric cars, light rail, telecommuting, home employment, and vehicle inspection.

Funding. An efficient system based on a balance of transportation modes, cost-saving practices, aggressive maintenance, and technical innovation. Funding from governmental gasoline taxes, the Austin Transportation Fee, and toll roads for city, county, and regional roads and transportation projects. Evaluation of funding sources, taking into account the following criteria: allows for faster project completion; local dollars are used to leverage state and federal dollars; an undue burden is not placed on any socioeconomic group; funds are raised efficiently; funds are not reallocated without the consent of the funding body; the balance of transportation modes is improved; the overall efficiency of the transportation system is enhanced; the burden is placed on those that create the most wear and tear; and the cost of additional usage of facilities is appropriately distributed.

IX. Travis County Government

Budget. A single budget officer; performance/program budget prepared and made available to the public before public hearings; and budget approval before the adoption of the tax rate and before the beginning of the fiscal year.

Law enforcement. Increased cooperation between city and county law enforcement officers; increased use of interlocal contracts between county and incorporated governmental units.

Wastewater management. Improved cooperation among the city, county, Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) in the enforcement of wastewater regulations.

Parks. A unified county park system organized and maintained by a master plan.

Tax assessment. Fair and equitable appraisal of all real property in Travis County.

Details of these positions can be found in the LWVAA's 2006 Annual Meeting Workbook.

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