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INTRODUCTION

This packet, a Members' Packet, which goes out to Local Leagues and will be posted on the LWVAL web site, contains:

- **Consensus Questions**

A Members' Worksheet. Specific questions geared to the Briefing Papers (BPs) on five topics. Members should fill out these worksheets **after** reading the BPs and bring it to the meeting for the discussion.

[**A Study Leaders' Worksheet** will be sent in the Leaders' Packet. It contains the specific questions from Members' Worksheet plus General Questions for each of the five topics for consensus. These will be used to structure the meetings and for the Consensus Report to LWVAL.]

- **Briefing Papers**

The eight papers present the objective information gathered on study topics. They offer reliable information, in some cases "inside information," carefully verified. For three of the eight topics, no Consensus Questions are posed. For the five topics with Consensus Questions attached, the BPs offer pros and cons on the questions with background and explanations.

Like former League publications, *Facts and Issues*, the BPs serve as resources for studying legislative topics and remain available in Local Leagues for future use. They are published to League leaders by email and for all members on the LWVAL web site on October 1, 2005. Publication for public education will follow.

- **Instructions and suggestions for League members [and Study Leaders"]**
Instructions in the Leaders' Packet]

Advice on how to use the materials in the packet, which are not in the form most familiar to many members. We believe they will produce better discussion of the issues, allow fuller reporting of members' views, and lead to clear positions on issues if consensus is reached.

- **[Report forms in Leader's Packet]**

Two documents:

- a) A cover form describing the consensus process in each Local League
- b) One Consensus Report Form (a Study Leaders' Worksheet) for the Local League as a whole, including both consensus answers to the specific questions of on the Worksheet and answers to summary questions that reflect each League's conclusions.

Due to Study Chair by April 1, 2006.

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SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR BRIEFING PAPERS AND CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

The study committee based its Consensus Questions and Briefing Papers on the following sources:

- Confidential interviews with a cross-section of legislators, including Democrats and Republicans, urban and non-urban, women and men, blacks and whites, those in or out of leadership positions, freshmen and veterans. Also legislative support staff, lobbyists and a range of knowledgeable observers, including former legislators.
- An anonymous mail survey of all legislators. The results of this survey, which had a 55% response rate, are in the *Appendix*.
- Scholarship on state legislatures in general and on the study topics. See *Selected References*.
- Publications by and about the Alabama Legislature. See *Selected References*.

Information from these diverse sources, considered in combination, permitted verification of the information received and used.

The study was conducted in accordance with the League of Women Voters' *Mission* and the *Vision, Beliefs and Intentions* posted on the LWVAL web site.

Most study issues are complex enough to demand careful consideration of differing points of view and weighing of pros and cons on policies to be recommended. The League's Consensus process is designed to encourage members to exchange views and debate the merits of policy proposals, after they have studied the objective information in the Briefing Papers. They then seek agreement on all or some of the questions asked, first within each Local League and then among all Leagues in the state. On the basis of the Local League Consensus Reports, the study committee and the LWVAL Board will evaluate the degree of consensus throughout the state.

When the LWVAL Board agrees that Consensus has been reached on some or all questions, Program Positions will be formulated for use by the League for advocacy as opportunities arise to influence public policy. The next statewide LWVAL meeting, Council, in the late spring of 2006 will affirm or reject the positions. The objective study materials, in this case the Briefing Papers, are usually published for public education.

This process embodies the League's belief in the power of collective decision-making for the common good. In League's 85 year history, its commitment to act only after study and member agreement has preserved League's credibility, even in times of controversy, and established its reputation for non-partisanship, accuracy, fairness, and balance in the eyes of governments and citizens, whether or not they agree with all of our policy positions.

This study has the potential to increase understanding of the legislature among League members and the public. LWV's mission is not merely to promote grassroots action but "the active and informed participation of citizens in government." Both legislators and citizens testify to the need for better communication based on better information to build the trust necessary to raise the levels of expectation and accomplishment in Alabama.

A fair question for League members to ask is whether or not this study can make a difference in the real world of the legislature, dominated by forces far more powerful than public interest lobbyists like LWV. Studies of successful legislative reform repeatedly demonstrate that the key factor in successful reform is one or a group of strong leaders. In all cases these leaders built their reforms by adapting ideas already proposed and studied. It is not naïve to believe that the League study can produce such ideas and that by interviewing and surveying legislators we may already begun to encourage their attention to weaknesses to be improved and strengths to be maintained.

Members of the Study Committee

Ginnie Bennett	Auburn	Anne Shumaker	Gadsden
Yvonne Koslowsky	Auburn	Jeanette Vandermeer	Tuscaloosa
Anne Permaloff	Montgomery	Carolyn Tamblyn	Auburn
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<i>Formerly Beth Kellum, Montgomery</i>			

October 1, 2005