

SUSTAINABILITY POSITION STUDY, 2005-6

SHOULD LWVNM ADOPT A STATE SUSTAINABILITY POSITION OR PRINCIPLE?

PROS

The League needs to be able to be able to integrate its natural resources positions with its education and advocacy based on government and social policy positions. Otherwise economic and social policy considerations will continue to trump ecological considerations, leading to the League's supporting governmental and social policies that will fail if society continues down its current unsustainable path.

Having a sustainability position or principle will assist the League in formulating a comprehensive and consistent set of positions on cross-cutting issues. An example is New Mexico water policy, which includes not only looking out for water quality but also economic considerations such as privatization of municipal water systems and the potential conflict between fossil fuels and water quality at Otero Mesa, and governmental issues such as the creation of a Strategic Water Reserve to meet the requirements of the interstate water compact.

Consideration of sustainability will heighten the League's awareness of the extent to which informed local decision-making is essential to our well-being and could significantly improve its positions on issues that are important to the strengthening of democracy in the U.S.

With sustainability as a major criterion, LWVNM education and advocacy will increasingly address the root causes of problems, rather than simply reacting to the most obvious symptoms.

CONS

"Sustainability" is an ill-defined concept that has been degraded to the point that it can be used to mean whatever the speaker wants it to mean, as in the oxymoron "sustainable growth." At best, it is too complex an issue to be dealt with satisfactorily in a League position. At worst, it is a vacuous concept that provides no direction.

"Sustainability" is a term associated with radical "left" politics, to such an extent that many consensus-oriented organizations are now avoiding its use. The League too should avoid association with these politicized connotations.

The League already has positions that enable it to educate and advocate for policies that promote sustainability. For example, the LWVUS has recommended that the U.S. sign on to the Kyoto Protocol Treaty on the basis of existing positions.

Adoption of sustainability as a principle might require modification of other League positions that have been arrived at by study and consensus.

A reading of the League principles (<http://www.lwvnm.org/principles.html>) makes it clear that the League is primarily a good government organization. Elevating sustainability to the level of a principle would be a significant change in direction for the League, and runs the risk of broadening its scope beyond the point where it can be effective.

Please go to <http://www.lwvnm.org/sustainability.html> for many more references and links.