

## **Guidelines and Suggestions for Interviews of Local Legislators**

### **Goals for 2007-2008 Interviews**

The two goals of the interviews are to establish each legislator's priorities in the coming session and his/her views on issues that currently are part of public discourse.

The primary focus for these interviews is gathering information and establishing a good working relationship with the legislators for the future. That is why the interviews are being conducted by Local League members and Members at Large who are contacting those who represent their city or county.

League interviewers should never pursue a personal agenda or express personal opinions on the issues or the legislature and its members. These are League interviews and should convey the League way of operating. You are there as a nonpartisan interviewer who is seeking information from a busy public servant.

### **Time**

Schedule interviews any time after you receive the interview packet and before January 21<sup>st</sup>. Although the session begins February 5, some committees will be busy in January.

### **Reporting to LWVAL**

An Interview Report Form has been supplied for recording the interviews. One form should be filled out for each interview; this should be done by the person(s) who conducted the interview.

Please send the form to LWVAL as soon as possible after an interview is conducted. You may keep a copy for your Local League files, but treat the information received from the interviews as League information, not public information.

*Please report by January 21st, if at all possible.* Send reports to Anne Permaloff, 637 Horseshoe Curve, Pike Road, Alabama 36064 OR [grifton\\_mtgy@bellsouth.net](mailto:grifton_mtgy@bellsouth.net)

### **Logistics**

Whenever possible use a two-person team to conduct an interview. One person can take the lead with the opening and the questions; the other can take notes and ask follow-up questions. We realize that each Member at Large will probably conduct solos interviews.

Call to set up an interview. Offer appointments over a range of times so that it will be hard for legislators to refuse. If no face-to-face meeting is possible, suggest a phone interview as an alternative. If you suggest this, you may be asked to conduct the interview immediately; so, be prepared and have the interview questions and a pencil at the ready. Use the telephone options as your fallback position.

Meet at the legislator's office or another place he/she chooses, or at a neutral site, like a public library. Avoid meeting over food or drinks.

Refuse, politely, to meet with a substitute. Say that you will wait to interview her/him another year. Do the same if a substitute appears unannounced for the appointment. Be respectful of the legislator's time. Thirty minutes is probably a reasonable time to request and to take, unless the legislator wishes to continue beyond that time.

*Do not* send the questions ahead of time. You can state the goals of the interview and their focus on the upcoming 2008 Legislative session.

### **Conducting the Interview**

Ask the questions as they are written. All Leaguers should ask the same questions and state the same goals. Be sure to read the interview questions and be familiar with them prior to the interview. If an interview team is used, both members of the team need to know the questions. Your first reading of the questions should come *before* you call to set up an appointment.

The interview time is for asking questions and getting answers, not for discussing League positions in depth. If you are asked questions about the League, "Useful Ways to Characterize the League" (see below) may be helpful, but if you are unable to answer the questions, you can also say that you will take the questions to the state Advocacy Committee and get back to the legislator. If you make this promise, be sure to follow through on it and contact the Advocacy Committee and then get back to the legislator with the information.

Be prepared with an answer if the legislator asks what use will be made of his/her statements. Indicate that a report will be sent to the state Advocacy Committee, which plans state league action. Your Local League should decide ahead of time what use it might like to make of the information locally and stick to what you promise. A general response might be that League members hope to inform themselves on the issues and, by learning his/her positions to work with her/him more effectively.

### **Useful Ways to Characterize the League (For use if needed)**

Any presentation of the League's priorities should be brief and low-key.

Just handing the legislator a copy of the League's priorities for 2007-2008 might suffice as a fair exchange for the legislators' sharing their goals and views. (You might also take a copy of Principles of the League with you for sharing as well.)

Indicate that LWVAL has a Legislative Liaison, Sue Flood of Auburn, who attends the sessions and who will introduce herself if she has not already done so.

### Key Points about the League

The League encourages the informed participation of citizens in government, works to increase the understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The League advocates only on the basis of its positions, which are reached after study and membership agreement, or through consensus among the membership.

For over 85 years the League has monitored voting issues and provided Voter Service earning a reputation for fairness, nonpartisanship, and integrity in these activities.

We welcome members of all parties, races and genders.