

BILLINGS LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

CONSENSUS POSITIONS

A. Consensus on Local Government-1975, updated 2005

1. Good local government should provide:

- a. clear lines of responsibility**
- b. defined job descriptions**
- c. policy-making authority**
- d. checks and balances**
- e. provision for maximum citizen participation**
- f. accessibility and accountability to the public**
- g. recall provision for elected officials**

2. Administrative officials should be appointed on the basis of qualifications, rather than by election process. Professional management should be utilized in whatever form of government exists.

3. Cooperation between the three local governmental units, city, county and school district should be encouraged in providing services equitably and efficiently, and in the planning of large facilities.

4. Good government seeks out and recognizes the needs of all members of the community.

5. LWV recommends single-member districts for county commissioners.

6. The LWV of Billings strongly recommends that any elected governmental study commissions should work together, not separately, with the goal of further unifying governmental services for efficiency.

B. Consensus on Alternate Sources of Revenue-1981 updated 2005

Having studied the effect of inflation on the Billings City budget, it is the consensus of the League of Women Voters of Billings that property taxes cannot continue to be depended upon as the main source of income for the city of Billings. In order to relieve the pressure on property taxes alternate sources of money will need to be enabled and adopted.

The League of Women Voters of Billings believes that the alternate sources of money should be judged according to the following criteria:

- 1. They should be responsive to the changes in the economy.**
- 2. They should be assessed equitably.**
- 3. They should be administered in a cost efficient manner.**

4. The source should be sufficient to meet the growing needs of the city.

5. Since Billings is a retail center for a very large area, as well as a tourist destination, a local option sales tax should be considered. (2005)

C. Consensus on Consolidation-1982 - updated 2005

In judging any form of local government, we use a number of long-established criteria:

1. Clear lines of responsibility
2. Systems of checks and balances
3. Provision for maximum citizen participation
4. Accessibility and accountability to the public
5. Administrative officials hired on the basis of qualification rather than by election.

In 1982, the League of Women Voters of Billings believed it essential to consolidate law enforcement. In 2005, we continue to recommend consolidation, particularly of city and county planning, and of other departments as well.

D. Consensus on Incarceration-passed 1984, updated 2000,2005,2016

The League's History

In 1984, The League of Women Voters Billings studied jail expansion and reached consensus that a new jail facility was needed. It has since been built and then expanded.

After the LWVB 2000 study of the women's prison in Billings, it became apparent that it is not possible to build to overcome crowding problems. Studies show that alternatives are distinctly more effective with regard to recidivism and rehabilitation. Therefore, alternatives are more cost effective for non-violent offenders, especially women. Our 2000 study resulted in serious concern about:

- 1. The intergenerational aspects of incarceration. Children of incarcerated parents too often grow up to become incarcerated themselves.
- 2. The numbers of women incarcerated in Montana are higher than other states relative to population.
- 3. The disproportionate number of incarcerated Indian women.

The League's Position

In 2005, the LWVB advocated for measures which reunite mothers with their children, rehabilitation counseling, job training, work furloughs and alternatives to prison for care-giving parents.

Criteria for facilities, 1984:

- 1. Facilities must be able to meet the requirements of federal law and the district court order, including the civil rights of all prisoners, the protection of the public, and the separation of classes of prisoners.
- 2. There must be provision for long-range growth and flexibility to allow for the ability to respond to philosophical and law enforcement changes over time and to allow for changeover to a regional facility.
- 3. It must be cost effective, now and into the future, utilizing all available resources to supplement property taxes.

- 4. It must contain satisfactory facilities for women and equality of treatment while imprisoned.

The 2016 study supported local efforts to find alternative methods of dealing with non-violent offenders, particularly in view of overcrowding in the Yellowstone County Jail. The LWV Billings concurs with the LWVUS position: "The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime. The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses."

The LWV Billings supports solitary confinement being reduced or eliminated as a long-term punishment or control and that the mentally ill must receive appropriate treatment and housing while incarcerated.

E. Consensus on Public Education, passed in 1987; updated 2005,2016

In 1987, the League of Women Voters of Billings stated that a primary purpose of public education in the United States is to provide the creative, critically-thinking, informed, and active citizens necessary for the success of our representative form of government.

In 2005, the legislature was ordered by Judge Sherlock to once again revise school funding so that the state pays a more proportionate share of the cost of schools to meet the state's constitutional responsibility to provide a system of education, to include Indian education for all. As a state, we must meet the Constitutional mandate described in the Sherlock decision in order to promote the acceptance and diversity that preserves our democratic institutions and safeguards our individual liberties.

Specifically, the League of Women Voters of Billings:

1. believes that in the spirit of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, intellectual and academic freedom for both students and teachers must be respected within the framework of law;
2. believes that public education must address in an unbiased and accurate manner, the facts of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world;
3. believes that public education must address in an unbiased and accurate manner, the facts of a multicultural, multi-ethnic world;
4. believes that there must not only be instruction in basic literacy and mathematical skills, but wide exposure to a diversity of viewpoints, with respect for all persons;
5. believes that the robust exchange of ideas is essential to the development of the ability to think critically and make rational decisions;
6. supports the concept that public schools are encouraged to teach about various religious ideas in the context of literature and history, but must never indoctrinate children in the tenets of any particular religion.
7. believes that public education in a democracy should be free and committed to equal educational opportunity and optimal intellectual growth for all students;
8. believes that parents' legitimate rights to control the education of their children must be balanced against the students' right to learn and the country's need for educated citizens;
9. believes that school governance at all levels must be accountable and accessible to citizens by giving adequate notice of meetings, holding open meetings and making public records available, in accordance with our open meeting law.
10. Believes that quality, developmentally appropriate and voluntary early learning experiences should be available to all children.

F. Consensus statements on Land Use Planning (based on 2003 Growth Policy Study)

- 1. Coordinate long-range work plans among city and county departments, school districts, appointed boards, and other governing bodies to make certain that government actions do not promote sprawl.**
- 2. Consider specific development requests in view of long-range plans and overall cumulative effects, rather than in isolation.**
- 3. Local governments should examine the overall structure of boards, commissions and committees that impact growth, zoning and subdivisions and implement procedures among them to eliminate fragmentation, duplication and confusion.**
- 4. Wherever possible, appoint to boards and commissions individuals whose primary consideration is for the general welfare of citizens, as opposed to those who benefit financially from board and commission decisions. Appointments should direct gender balance as well.**
- 5. Examine structure of boards, commissions, and committees that impact growth policy, zoning, and subdivision regulations. Implement procedures among the myriad boards, commissions, and committees to eliminate fragmentation, duplication, and confusion.**
- 6. Maximize public participation, improve planning outcomes, and minimize special interest impact by:**
 - a) improving public notice by using most effective and current means**
 - b. holding public meetings and hearings at convenient times and within neighborhoods of those affected by the issue at hand.**
- 7. Integrate long range transportation planning with all other planning throughout the county.**
- 8. Improve public transportation to make the community more socially cohesive, environmentally healthy and economically vibrant and .expand the use of multi-use trails and bike lanes.**
- 9. Build safe streets judiciously, without overbuilding in rural areas which encourages sprawl.**

G. Position on Transportation , developed from Impact on Issues, and adopted by both LWV Billings and LWVMT in 2008

The League of Women Voters proposes to reduce vehicular traffic by increasing the use of public transportation with expanded mass transit systems.

Improved public transportation will provide better and more affordable access to housing and jobs for Montana citizens and will help Montana to reach overall goals of conservation and reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

The League of Women Voters urges maintenance of existing highways and requests re-examination of plans for new highways in order to divert funding to public transportation.