

## REACHING CONSENSUS

Consensus is the basis of the grassroots character and effectiveness of the League of Women Voters. The League is a study and action organization. Therefore, it is important to have a clear expression of member views to determine what action to take. Consensus-taking is a complex procedure at the local, state and national level; it is puzzling to new members and challenging to experienced members and leaders.

The League's 'consensus' refers to the overall decision making process by which a League determines there is substantial agreement among members to discuss and arrive at conclusions on issues. The process is not a simple majority\* nor is it complete agreement; rather it is the overall 'sense of the group' as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions.

**How do we come to consensus?** We hold general information meetings, during the course of the study. Along with general information meetings, articles in our state and local newsletters, fact sheets and online information are available. We urge members to take advantage of the information so that they have a clear understanding of the issues involved.

**What if all members cannot participate in the process?** If all members are given the opportunity to participate and if the subject has been discussed with all pros and cons fully presented prior to the meeting, the meeting is valid. The quality of the discussion is as important as the quantity.

**Does the League ever take a vote at a consensus meeting?** Preferably not, because consensus is not based upon a simple majority. Most of the time the sense of the meeting can be determined from the discussion, but this becomes difficult, if everyone does not participate. It becomes almost impossible if many are silent. The discussion leader or leaders may ask "Are there others who feel this way?" or "Am I correct in saying that we agree that...." This will usually produce a response. If there is uncertainty, a show of hands may clarify whether there is substantial minority opinion. If this is the case consensus is lacking.

*\*A simple majority means that at least 51% of those casting a vote approve of the measure or candidate.*