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TEXAS LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

PRESIDENTS' COUNCIL

Austin, Texas

February 9-11, 1947

On February ninth, 1947, at the Stephen F. Austin Hotel, the Presidents' Council planned by the Texas League of Women Voters was called to order by the President, Mrs. Martin A. Row, at two o'clock p. m. In her opening remarks Mrs. Row said that this was to be an informal training session, a thinking together; that we wanted an expression of opinion and the thinking of all of those present at the time in order that "we may act also along with the State Board for making plans for what Texas is going to do." Thereupon she introduced all presidents and members of all the Leagues present:

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| Beaumont - - - | Miss Mary Montgomery | San Antonio - - - | Mrs. Porter |
| | Mrs. Edwards, V. P. | | Mrs. Sinkin |
| San Angelo - - | Mrs. Samuelson | | Mrs. Brockhausen |
| | Mrs. McMahan | Galveston - - - | Mrs. Gregory |
| Robstown - - - | Mrs. Harper | | Mrs. Knight |
| Midland - - - | Mrs. George Putnam | Texas City - - - | Mrs. H. Frazier |
| Dallas - - - | Mrs. Nurse | LaMarque - - - | Mrs. Cappleman |
| | Mrs. Ruggles | Corpus Christi - | Mrs. Greene |
| Austin - - - | Mrs. Rotsch | | Mrs. Scroggins |
| Port Arthur - | Mrs. Reeder | Ft. Worth - - - | Mrs. Mary Barnett |
| | Mrs. Hall | | Mrs. D. Trammell |
| Houston - - - | Mrs. Neilson | T.S.C.W. - - - | Miss Olive White |
| | Mrs. Adkins | | Miss Eleanor Wilson |
| | Mrs. Kilman | | |

The President then introduced Mrs. Allan G. C. Mitchell, Representative from the League of Women Voters of the United States, who took charge of the meeting.

Mrs. Mitchell said that she had been having Recognition Conferences throughout the State; that she had visited seven cities in seven days; that we all wanted to accomplish our purpose most effectively with the least effort, and that our aim was to adjust the proceedings in the local leagues so that they will mesh with the State and then on to the National level; that all leagues were, therefore, asked to get their by-laws so that they will correspond with the national as soon as possible as a yardstick for sitting down with the local boards to work out the local planning; that the League had expanded 27% in the last two years; that the budget was expanded so that National could send field help and we hope the State budget will expand to increase their labors; that the local leagues had expanded to an even greater degree than either State or National; then she said "how can we now plan to use this impetus in the light of the facts here?" She asked for subjects which the Council would like discussed, and the following were suggested:

- Aims and purposes of the League for the members
- Policies: nonpartisanship
- How to service new members (Board planning)
- Programming
- Finance
- How to get the League to plan rather than just the Board

NONPARTISANSHIP: Mrs. Mitchell made the following statements: Members can be very active in party politics but the League itself must remain absolutely nonpartisan; that the interpretation of this is the job of the Board; that this responsibility begins with the Nominating Committee (see p. 28 of Handbook). People who face the public and represent the League in the eye of the public: President, Finance Chairman, Membership Chairman, and these people must take no part in political activity at the time they are holding their offices on the Board.

What should the wife of a very active political party person do? This is for the Board's determination, depending on the local situation, but she should resign from the local league Board. Postmaster's wife? Even though this is a Civil Service office, this would have to vary from town to town according to the local situation.

Member as Justice of the Peace? "I would say 'no', for in Texas you must give the most rigid interpretation".

What about the wife of a labor organizer? Mitchell: "How is that connected with government?"

How about the husband who is active in the party at the time of the campaign but who is not running for office? During the time of the campaign the wife should not be doing any of the "front" things in the League. Again the local League will have to decide if this is reflective on the League. This is announced publicly and when the campaign is over and at a regular local election, she can be elected again.

Can a Board Member campaign for an issue? There is no reason why not, especially if she does it as an individual and not as a League member - if the League has taken no stand on the issue. If the National League has taken a stand, then perhaps she should have to resign from the Board for the time.

The Board must do long-term planning to be in a completely foolproof condition before the public - see Sec. 4, p. 29, Handbook. Perhaps you could ask this person to take a place which might challenge her but which would not place her on the Board or in the "eye" of the public.

In working for an issue you must first know that you are within the scope of the National program; then you must have an annual meeting of the local League to determine just exactly what you want to do; but your Board must know thoroughly what they are wanting to do, all of the phases of the issue. Your League cannot back a ticket. Materials must be in the hands of every League member, so that she will be absolutely and specifically informed of all the angles which might be involved.

Get citizens to thinking and stimulate them about the issues before you go to the community.

Question of Speakers re nonpartisanship: If the League wants one person, then it MUST get a speaker well known on the other side to be presented AT THE SAME TIME. DO NOT LET YOURSELVES EVER APPEAR PARTISAN AT A GREAT PUBLIC RALLY REGARDLESS OF PRESSURE.

ACTION

Mrs. Mitchell: Do our boards represent the thought of ALL of our League members? Are we completely democratic? The democratic form of government provides for abiding by the majority opinion with understanding and a hearing of the minority.

How do your members feel about issues? Polling membership: We have a representative form of government in our League organizational structure, because if you are trained in League you will think as you would think about the nature of the structure of your national government. The Board has the duty to speak for the members as the Board honestly feels the members feel. Some organizations must poll their members before they take action; this is the referendum type of government, and is a very slow process. The Board has the right only to act in what it honestly feels is the feeling of the membership, but in the League we do not take polls. You must do yourselves what you demand of your congressmen; you must present all sides and phases of a subject. We should spend more and more time in the League in the future in making up our minds, particularly on items on which we have taken a stand, and which we are studying. You must be awfully, awfully careful before taking a stand.

STANDARDS III A (1): It must be concerned with government or the League should not be active on it. Is it in the general interest? You could back a bond issue if it benefited only one part of the town, but be careful that it does not specially benefit one part or one group. Is it an issue that it will be a good thing for you to stimulate interest on the part of the citizens? If it is something of rather minor concern, then do not interest yourselves in it. How important is it? To how many people; can it be used as a tool for educating a lot of people? If not, do not enter it.

LOCALS: A local League must take its program of work before the State Board if it is on the State level. Working areas: A local League usually can only work within the city limits; a county league can work only in the County, unless another arrangement is made; otherwise the League must clear through the State office, because they are in a position to tell you if it will adversely affect other leagues.

Be specific in answering the questions to help the National League. Do you have a cross section of the community in your League membership? Geographically, perhaps yes; theoretically? Racial groups? How about an organization that aims at educating citizens? How about an organization that aims at teaching better citizenship? You can never go far ahead of public opinion; you can be a little bit in the vanguard, but not ahead - re racial or minority groups and problems. Is the National League a cross section: No!

PLANNING ON THE STATE LEVEL: Do the state project in the locals first until it is understood before it is presented to the public; you have to bring public opinion along with you for you cannot buck it.

SERVICING OF THE MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY: National Economics: -- Get an understanding of these economic problems so that we can make up our minds what we want to do about it. National is launching on a nationwide campaign designed to make the matter easier to reach the whole population. How do you get, not tens, but hundreds to using the slide? Suggestions: The League was one of the first organizations that ever launched radio forums, later it was dropped because so many others used it. The slide film is a new technique; they are cheap; they are simplified; go in pairs with the narrative, which one lady reads and one lady runs the picture, which you can stop at any time, or pull back, for discussion; speakers' bureau, for your own membership as well as for the community or for schools. Put teachers on the mailing list for literature. There are memos which accompany the slide film. Part of this educational program which will continue through the years are memoirs (Uncle Sam's Finances, etc.) How do you distribute memos? - boards, discussion groups, at luncheon meetings by reservation chairman. National is now providing a service at \$3.00 per year for standing orders of literature; schools, mailing service. League literature has tripled in the last two years. Do you service people who do not get to the discussion groups? They should have their own publications chairman working under the Board. The President should not be the Publications Chairman. This is a good place for a new member; she can use a committee. Send to men contributors (free); carry an item in budget "literature for contributors". If there is too much literature, give to schools before too old, to libraries, to prospective members.

ORIENTATION GROUPS: Every new member goes into an orientation group - usually three times. Houston has a play which is good at a new-member tea, etc., put "Twenty Five Years of a Great Idea" into the hands of every new member; ask the new member to read the memo and be prepared to ask questions about it when she comes.

BROADSIDES: This is a tool for reaching the community; they are not designed for our members, but for the public, for mass distribution, but it takes Board planning and an item in the budget because you cannot sell them. They have been plain because some objected to their being conspicuous. (City of Beaumont lets League insert broadsides in its water bill envelopes which go to everyone); libraries.

SUMMARY: Service the community, including racial groups; service members; better use of materials; party activity and necessity to lean over backwards to maintain strict nonpartisanship.

DISCUSSION GROUPS: Defining this term: These are a combination of study groups and the squads (action groups); an examination of the problem at hand and then geared to action, although not always geared to dramatic action as formerly -- ten or fifteen women meeting and getting the facts and then going out into the community and doing something about the facts; they should all do the same topic. Where a group studies only one subject say for a year, that is not a discussion group but it is a study group. All remarks should be addressed to the group rather than to a leader. After learning the facts, they should decide

how to use them! When groups get too large (more than 15, maybe 10) break the group down to about eight and start other groups. Reference: Community Education in Arlington, Va., University of Va., Extension Division.

The League Board is the controlling force in the League, but the action comes out of these small groups. The Board decides on the topics, and that is very important; the groups all study them at the same time, but the group members make the suggestions, so that the decision is made in the light of the requests or suggestions of the group personnel. When they are working on a topic, groups are given wide latitude about what they want to do about it: Window displays, polls, with booths downtown, using broadsides; floats in parades (using techniques of old suffragists); speakers' bureau; radio forums (sometimes a city-wide committee or sometimes it will be turned over to one of the units) in Junior colleges, with student debates (Leagues member to act as moderator). In Dallas the anti-inflation broadside was sent home with the children, also Dallas had an evening radio program; slide film.

Discussion groups must NOT be within themselves; they must stimulate others in the community.

CALLS FOR ACTION: The best action that Congressmen listen to: Who in the community is influential on this particular subject; so, go to him or them and ask them to write their congressmen. Contact people who are not Leaguers.

How do we see that the League does not die of over-work? There are different kinds of action leading to how the Board chooses legislative action. You can go to the community with information, but get information so that we can make up our minds; build public opinion. Lastly: Legislative action. So -- were the members prepared to act? Each League must decide for itself what kind of action it will take. Inform the members there is a call for action; maybe the Board would decide that the League could send a telegram in the name of the League. Inform Legislative Chairmen of other organizations when we get a call; inform the members of requests through bulletin. If you take no action (not even letting your members know), it is the only way your National has of finding out that your members do not know or that they disagree. Lack of preparation for action is a valid reason.

MAKING GROUPS SEEM PURPOSEFUL AND GETTING FACTS IN: The memo is here important; all could be handled by a trained leader with the members of the group having had material before hand, but you may need better trained people for handling the larger problems; as Bretton Woods, Reciprocal Trade, etc. How do you make contacts? Each leaguer is to contact as many friends or neighbors as possible to come to a group meeting to discuss a definite program. There must be planning by the leader in order to keep the group going. A LEADER MUST BE TRAINED; she must have a good, fair approach, and do not let people lead until they have at least studied or been in training.

MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION IN THE LEAGUE: Aim at getting differences of opinion; if you do not, you will have a dull group and it will soon fall apart; make it a short-time schedule and stick to it; make the people feel important and that they can contribute their ideas. Be sure that the leader summarizes. Give out questions to prepare for discussion at the next meeting. Ask for volunteers, saying that we need everybody here to take part. We should keep our eye on "more and better citizens and not more and more better experts". You need resource people in a larger city.

How do you start a group in a cold neighborhood? Two types of training: (1) Let's Lead a Discussion Group, and (2) get your materials for the group for the next time. A Board member must be assigned to watch these groups, and train them.

STATE LEVEL (Connecticut): State trained teams of people; mastered the pamphlets (?); wrote a National person for all information (gathered their forces together), and then sent those teams into the local leagues to get discussion groups started. Your Part In the Discussion -- 100 @ 75¢.

President has the job of building other leaders.

Board planning should be within a span of a year, but flexible; do not become too departmentalized or set. When you get a crisis by all means adjust to it. The Board plans what it wants all the groups to study; this is then sent out to the Board member who is group chairman. In general there are four persons on the Board who are called "Resource Chairmen", and each would train the group leaders in her area of knowledge -- In International Relations: (1) economic area; (2) social types of legislation; (3) state items; (4) local.

The Discussion Group leaders should have a meeting with themselves, and they then report interesting results of the previous meeting to the area chairman. Others of the members of the groups could take turns in coming to these meetings.

JOB OF PRESIDENT: How do you develop more leaders? How do you lighten the president's load? This is the way; splinterizing the job, and there you get all of these experienced leaders.

PRESIDENT SHOULD ONLY:

1. Make out an agenda for board meetings
2. Limit time devoted to various subjects and stick to it
3. Send copy of minutes of Board meeting to Board members
4. Have National letters sent directly to Board members
5. Keep Board harmonious and active as a whole - group relationship
6. Ask Board members for written reports
7. President needs to get group opinion, everybody pooling her opinion
8. Appreciation should be expressed by the President to each Board member.

BOARDS SHOULD:

1. See that the Board is manned
2. See that the job is done satisfactorily.

We might spend some time in looking back in order that we may know where we are going. So, we have

1. Recognition of the problem
2. Definition of the problem
3. Exploring all of the possible solutions
4. Choosing the solution
5. Putting it into action. Lastly, evaluating it.

It is necessary for every Board member to read all The Local Leader's Handbook.

February 10th, 1947. Mrs. Row announced State Convention at San Antonio, Texas, June 18th and 19th, Gunter Hotel; about 10:00 a. m. Wednesday, 18th, until noon on Thursday.

BY LAWS: Mrs. Row announced that the Board, after listening to Mrs. Mitchell's reasons, had voted to reverse itself on holding conventions every year. There followed some discussion on expenses of holding a council and convention every year. The group moved to approve the idea of a biennial convention. - Carried.

The President read the By-Laws Committee recommendation limiting the terms of State officers, that no officer shall serve for longer than two years excepting the case of the President, etc. A vote of those present was taken, with the result 21 voted for the flexible, model bylaws; 8 against; so a majority did want the model by-laws; with no restrictive clauses. Mrs. Sam J. Smith, member of the By-Laws committee was present and stated the reasons for the restrictions having been included. Thereupon general discussion ensued. Mrs. Nurse moved, with a second, that a rising vote of thanks be given Mrs. Sam Smith, Austin, for her good work on the By-Laws committee. Motion carried out.

FINANCE: Mrs. Mitchell asked what services did we want from the State and National offices? That now was the time to give advice to the State Board that is to serve you during the coming year.

Suggestions: 1. Someone to aid with discussion groups.

M. said: Membership opinion is so very much more important than board opinion.

National would help in attaining a goal; that two members are assigned to finance: Mrs. Dyke on the National Board, and a staff member, Miss Bertha Pabst. In visiting that Miss Pabst spends the mornings with the people going out to work on the campaign (1) going over the techniques; talks with the finance and budget committees; (2) after lunch, she meets with the Board; studies approach in the community; how much publicity, etc. so that you will know where you are going. She will go to every local league that agrees to use her by putting on a real campaign. Mrs. M. said she thinks "that we shall have every state in the United States organized within ten years, if we can strengthen the weak leagues and create new ones".

Assessments are completely discouraged because the State and the National want a voluntary interest. You must take into consideration the possibilities of the community; the age and size of the league; the respect of the league in the community; that according to statistics, 80% of the contributors repeat the next year. That an Indiana city has 100 members, sends \$500.00 to the State, thus starving itself; that Indiana state has 1700 members, sends 2 to 3,000.00 to the National. You ought to push your budget for the State; capitalize on your plans, as well as on your state jobs and national items: Dumbarton Oaks, etc. Clear with the Chamber of Commerce; if they will not do this, then appeal to your State Board. This is not a community-wide campaign; this is calling on a selected list; you offer the men the rare privilege of becoming associate members of the League; give them candidates questionnaire answers or voter's guides; raise all of the money at one time if at all possible. Do not have several campaigns.

Mrs. Porter, San Antonio, moved that we at the Council return to our local leagues pointing out to our boards their inadequacy, and recommend that we work harder for better State financing. Motion seconded and carried.

Mrs. Reeder, Port Arthur, moved that we recommend to the Budget Committee that they aim at a State budget of at least \$10,000.00. Motion seconded and carried.

Mrs. McMahan, San Angelo, moved that we ask the National organization for as much help as they can give us in meeting the proposed budget. Motion seconded and carried.

SUMMARY: Mrs. Mitchell: We have twenty five years of experience, and we have a tremendous job - the saving of the democratic system; always think of the League as a tool to do the job which you use here in Texas and in the United States. We have done a job; we have examined the By-Laws; how we make program; some of the techniques of Discussion Groups, ending with what we want from our State office; you have not discussed enough what you want from your National office, but that she would make notes and report back to the National office. All of this we have accomplished, but the wonderful thing is that we have sat together and planned to do a job together. She said that she had found not only Texas exciting, but the League of Women Voters of Texas very exciting.

The presidents met at a banquet that evening and were entertained with clever skits from the two campus leagues. Also the slide film "Economics for Everybody", was shown by Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Rotsch. The discussion which followed brought out the suggestion that the running commentary should be in more of a question form and not so didactic.

Mrs. Mitchell spoke briefly on "Foreign Policy" and at the close Miss Olive White expressed the deep appreciation of all the Council for the opportunity of knowing Mrs. Mitchell.