

My March 2022 Election Report concluded with the following:

This 2022 session did not accomplish much to improve voting in West Virginia, but many bills that could have done great harm failed in the legislative process. So, do we rejoice or mourn?

We suggest neither. One message gleaned from our Legislature is that success next year depends on advocacy that starts earlier and is more focused and strategic. We hope you will join us.

Then I formally proposed a different League strategy and that proposal was adopted, in principle, by the Board. I offered to come back with more detail, for review by the Board and potential submission to membership for adoption. This document provides some of that detail.

Legislative action – advocacy – on priority bills is a longstanding approach for the League. But in today's political environment, we need to do more and/or do differently. Continuing the same approaches and expecting different outcomes may meet the definition of insanity. For example, I recognize (retrospectively) flaws in my own approaches (e.g., with only 60 days, many mid-session efforts are going to be limited in impact).

Consider two ways of looking at our advocacy in the Legislature.

1. Traditionally, we have taken a rather hands-off approach to policy advocacy. We agree upon and distribute annual legislative priorities, but most of our communication with legislators comes immediately before the session begins or mid-session. Response is lukewarm, at best. Clearly, these methods are not achieving our policy goals.
2. I am proposing a modified way of looking at League advocacy, specifically: *advocacy that starts earlier and is more focused and strategic*. We already prioritize policies that are consistent with our values, and we advocate to realize them. However, that advocacy needs to be more persistent, a year-round effort, not concentrated immediately before the legislative session begins or mid-session.

This second approach is nontraditional, and you may find it unorthodox. However, to achieve successes in the WV Legislature we need to think beyond the traditional.

How Would This Work?

We have limited bandwidth, so we need a strategy that respects that. To accommodate our bandwidth, we have already decided to select priorities and stick to them. With the LLAW, we can start small and grow our efforts over time. I propose we start with our **#1 priority, Voting**.

To achieve any of this, we need to develop a plan and then implement and hone that plan. This requires a **workgroup**. Therefore, **action #1** is to assemble a strong, committed workgroup from members (and potentially, non-members) from across the state.

Here are a few ideas (bare bones at this point) for what the LLAW could do:

1. Select a **limited** number of bills to follow and advocate for. Again, prioritize and focus.
2. Rely on bills from last session as a guide. This is practical because bills frequently are recycled from session to session, and we already have a summary of bills from 2022.
3. Use letter writing, phone calls, coalition building, and outreach, but don't stop there.
4. Assign tasks to the people who are best equipped to carry them out. (For example, I have useful skills, but I'm not a people person.)
5. Establish relationships with legislators who are in leadership positions for our priority bills. A bill goes nowhere if leadership won't put it on an agenda.
 - Conduct forums.
 - Sponsor panel discussions.
 - Search for common ground.
 - Share perspectives.
 - Ensure that all legislative contact is bipartisan/non-partisan. We need to make our non-partisan status our biggest asset.¹
6. Convert phone trees into advocacy networks; activate them during the legislative session as priority bills are considered.
7. Communicate our activities to constituents and encourage their involvement.

Conclusion

Originally, I conceived this nontraditional proposal to counter my disappointment at our Legislature's accomplishments. I do not want to mourn or whine. I want us to DO SOMETHING. But to get a different outcome, we need to do something different, modify our approach but maintain our integrity.

Finally, let me emphasize:

- This is a proposal.
- Please agree, disagree, or offer other recommendations.
- I welcome your ideas and feedback.

¹ We sponsored a virtual panel discussion on redistricting with Del. Fleischauer (D), Del. Hansen (D), and Sen. Trump (R). Some of you may recall it as an excellent example of what a bipartisan free exchange of ideas can be.