



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

1212 Guadalupe St., Suite 107 • Austin, TX 78701-1800
(512) 472-1100 • Fax (512) 472-4114 • lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org

RECORDED LEGISLATIVE VOTES: Let the Sunshine In January 2007

Texas needs a constitutional amendment requiring the legislature to record votes by legislators' names and make them readily accessible to the public.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends on the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by making public records accessible.

This can be achieved by requiring that Texas legislators record their votes by legislators' name and make them readily available to the public. Consider:

- More than 40 of the 50 states already record legislative votes. Texas is the only large state that doesn't.
- Eighty-four percent of Texans favored a requirement for legislators to record their votes by name, according to a 2003 Scripps Howard Texas Poll. Further, eighty percent favored a constitutional amendment to accomplish this.

The lack of routinely recorded votes on substantive issues presents a significant roadblock to Texas citizens' ability to hold their legislators accountable.

Texas needs to routinely record all substantive legislative votes. Under the present rules, the legislators can decide if and when their votes are individually recorded. Legislators now record some votes, but it is entirely at their discretion. A vote is not recorded unless requested by a member or members of that house. Further, even when a vote is recorded the information is very difficult for the average citizen to find.

According to *The Dallas Morning News*, nearly half of the 99 pieces of substantive bills that got final approval on June 1, 2003, were passed without a recorded vote. They ranged from investigations of nursing home deaths to solutions for the state's high school dropout rate.

Opponents claim that recording all substantive legislative votes would be cumbersome and expensive. *In fact, the House already has an electronic voting system in place for its 150 members and the Senate could follow suit for its 31 members without undue effort. Research shows that the fraction of the two-year budget spent on recording house votes in the last regular session was .00000045. (Yes, six zeros!)* * The amount required to record all substantive votes would remain a miniscule part of the budget. What is the value of democracy in Texas?

ADVOCACY PAPER

Summary:

The votes of the United States Congress are routinely recorded, as well as votes in over forty states. There is no reason the Texas Legislature shouldn't be able to provide the same information for its constituents.

The legislature should place a high priority on ensuring citizens' right to know how their elected representatives voted in this 2007 session and in the future.

A Constitutional Amendment requiring the legislature to record votes by legislators' names and make them readily available to the public would do this.

- Source: Legislative Reference Library

**Published by the League of Women Voters of Texas
1212 Guadalupe #107, Austin, Texas 78701
lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org
www.lwvtexas.org
(512) 472-1100
January 2007**