

Testimony
in Support of a Constitutional Amendment to Routinely Record Votes
and Make Them Readily Available to the Public
House Committee on State Affairs
March, 2007

The League of Women Voters of Texas and its 32 local Leagues support a constitutional amendment requiring the Texas Legislature to record votes by legislators' names and make them readily accessible to the public. The routine recording of non-ceremonial votes is a bedrock principal of democracy and practiced by almost all local, state and national governmental bodies.

While we applaud recent actions of the House and Senate in enacting rules which strengthen recording of votes and making them accessible on the Internet, future legislatures can choose not to maintain such practices. Only a constitutional amendment can make this accountability a permanent practice.

When citizens learn that the Legislature does not record all the votes of their representatives by name, they are incredulous. Eighty-four percent of Texans favored requiring legislators to record their votes by name, and eighty percent favored a constitutional amendment to accomplish this (Scripps Howard Texas Poll, 2003). Similar results for routine recording have been corroborated on recent surveys by Representative Tony Goolsby in his District (2004, 2006).

The filing of six bills on recorded votes in this House Committee on State Affairs reflects growing interest in this issue. **The League strongly supports HJR 17 (Naishtat) since it is the only which proposes a constitutional amendment, recorded votes on numerous steps in the legislative process, and rapid publication of votes for availability to the public.**

After every regular session of the Texas Legislature, citizens vote on numerous constitutional amendments, the subjects of which are arcane compared to the democratic process of recorded votes. We note with interest that HJR 50 (Jackson) proposes a constitutional amendment for recorded votes in the election of the Speaker of the House; we trust that the citizens of Texas will be given this opportunity regarding the passage of their legislation.

In order for citizens to know how their representative voted on non-ceremonial issues, votes should be recorded on all readings and amendments. Various electronic means, including the use of smart cards and other technologies, can make this a rapid and efficient process; routine recording of votes has been implemented in 40 other states legislatures. The fraction of a two-year budget in Texas spent on recording votes is estimated at .00000045 (Source: Legislative Reference Library).

Without a constitutional amendment, legislators retain discretion on when to and when not to record their votes, leaving the public uncertain as to how their representatives voted on various issues. Having to repeatedly address if and when representatives are going to record their votes every session is time-consuming for citizens and for legislators and should not be necessary. If an issue is important enough to be considered by the Legislature, it is important enough for a citizen to be able to know how their representative voted.

In the 2005 Legislature, the Senate unanimously passed a bill to routinely record votes. The League urges the Senate and the House to pass a constitutional amendment in the 2007 session requiring the Texas Legislature to record votes by legislators' names and make them readily accessible to the public. Thank you for your attention to this extremely important issue for Texans.