

Issue: VOTE

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Endorsements:

2) Please fill out a Strategy Chart.

1) Describe the Issue (what is the problem & what is the solution).

The current processes surrounding elections in Washington State, including voter registration and ballot submission, are inaccessible, especially to people that have been historically disenfranchised. Students and young people have often been provided with the least access to these processes, largely leaving the student voice out of democratic decisions. Voter turnout is low at both the state and federal levels and the lack of access to the voting process is largely to blame. Making voter registration and ballot submission more open and accessible would provide a lot more opportunity for students' voices to be heard and represented. The proposed bills that could accomplish

Motor Voter-HB 1294, SB 5140

This legislation would allow people to pre-register to vote at the department of licensing when they turn 16. Once the person turns 18 they would automatically be registered to vote and would start receiving ballots in the next election. California and Oregon have both implemented these systems in the last year.

Landlord Voter Reg-HB 1866 SB 5259

This legislation would require that landlords provide new tenants with a voter registration form. Considering that people between age 18-25, a predominantly student age group, move nearly every year this should help make sure that people can keep their registration up to date.

Voting Rights Act - HB 1745 (ESHB 1745) SB 5668

The Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA) was created to address the systemic exclusion of people of color from the political process. This would provide support to ensure that local elections allow for accurate representation of the district they represent. Recently Yakima, which had up until this election never elected a Latino council member despite 40% of the district being Latino, spent ~\$ 1 million defending their election system against the ACLU and lost. The WVRA would help to create truly representative districts to prevent these problems, but also creates a different court channel than the federal process that will be more efficient in time and money.

Extend Deadline-HB 1144 1428 SB 5527

This legislation would extend the voter registration deadlines to eleven days prior to elections and allow for same-day voter registration at the auditor's office through election day. The arbitrary deadlines currently in place prematurely end voter registration so that only those who know and understand the deadlines are able to participate in elections. These deadlines severely disadvantage students in Washington. As most of the public colleges and universities operate on quarter systems, the current systems only allow for student voter registration drives to happen in the first two weeks of school which drastically limits the effectiveness of these efforts. County auditors, who would be impacted the most by

this change in legislation, have expressed their support for these bills. Extending voter registration deadlines would substantially increase student access to elections.

Access for voters with disabilities- HB (&SHB) 1039

This legislation would allow people who are unable to sign their ballot to do a voter registration affidavit once and then simply make their mark or use a signature stamp for their ballots in the future instead of requiring two signatories.

Prepaid postage - HB 1724 SB 5344

This legislation would require return envelopes for ballots to have prepaid postage, essentially abolishing the poll tax currently associated with voting. The people of Washington State should not have to pay for a stamp in order to have their voices heard, voting is a right that should be freely exercised. Requiring a stamp in order for a ballot to be mailed is a barrier to participating in the political process. Prepaid postage on ballots would help take down the obstacles associated with voting and provide better access for all people.

3) Please explain briefly how/if this issue meets the following qualifications:

1. Is it winnable?

These issues are winnable, they will just need to be discussed and advocated for over longer periods of time like most issues. SBs: 5527 (11 Day VR), 5259 (New Tenants VR), and 5668 (WA VRA) all made it to the Senate Rules Committee in the 2015 Legislative Session—progress from previous years. SB 5140 (Motor VR) is making progress and continues to gain support from legislators and county auditors. Finally SB 5344 (prepaid ballot postage) also made it through the Senate Gov. Operations & State Security committee and was referred to Ways and Means.

2. Does it directly impact and improve students' lives?

These issues directly impact and improve students' lives by increasing the ability for their voices to be heard and represented in our government and reducing the costs associated with the process of voting. Since these costs disproportionately affect people with a lower income, like most students and people with marginalized identities, they decrease voter registration and turnout and therefore the representation of these groups.

3. Does it have a clear target?

Rep. Sam Hunt (D): Chair of House State Government Committee

Rep. Hans Dunshee (D): Chair of House Appropriations Committee

Sen. Pam Roach (R): Chair of Senate Government Operations and Security

Sen. Andy Hill (R): Chair of Senate Ways and Means

*Potentially other legislators as bills get shifted around but we can expect these 4 to be the primary targets

4. Does it have a clear and realistic time frame?

Yes, there is a clear and realistic time frame for each of the bills next session, most gained traction last year despite it being a budget focus year, in a policy year many of these should come into their own as viable legislation.

5. Does it have state organizing and lobbying angle?

Regulation of specifics with voter registration lies at the State level, and this issue is one that WWU has consistently organized around with relative success.

6. Could students build a diverse campus coalition around this issue?

Students for the past few sessions have been building a coalition around these issues. We have the possibility to continue our coalition with the Vote Coalition into session and work on making voter registration more accessible for students in the state of Washington. As students encounter these barriers and are made aware of how they disproportionately impact young people and people with marginalized identities, they are inspired to change these policies.

7. Is it likely to be debated and acted upon by the Legislature in the next year?

Yes, all of these bills are likely to be debated and acted upon next session. They've been discussed the last few session and with pressure from stakeholders, the conservation will likely continue.

8. Will it strengthen and expand efforts within Western?

Incredibly so, WWU already has a record breaking and powerful voter registration drive, these pieces of legislation could help us to do an even better job reaching out to students that we aren't currently getting to. In addition to this the increase in numbers of voters registered directly correlates to the amount of power that we have with legislators in Olympia.

9. Can you provide background information and the current context of the issue?

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10. What creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage the media and excite new students around this issue?

-Doing a turn out for what video series to let students and legislators know why voting is important to students

- A letter writing campaign to legislators from students about the difficulties of registering to vote and the barriers that prevent students from voting, and pressure from constituents

- Student testimony as to how these issues impact them and why increasing access matters

- Sharing photos from ballot drop box to show that students are interested and excited about voting