



# Legislative Affairs Council

## Choosing an Issue

**Issue: Prepaid Postage on Ballots**

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**Proposed Action Agenda Item Title: Eliminate the Poll Tax**

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

In a “free country” it should be free to vote. Poll taxes in state elections were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court under the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment in 1996—and yet, today in Whatcom County voters are required to put a stamp on their ballots which is essentially a poll tax. Access to and knowledge of where to buy stamps, as well as having to pay for a stamp in order to have your vote count, hinder the capacity of elections to be free, fair and democratic. Requiring postage adversely affects poor people and students. With our current system, only those willing and able to purchase postage are represented in elections. Students already face barriers to the elections process, specifically on local and state levels, because of the lack of access to resources and information on how these processes work. These barriers also work to further marginalize those people most likely to be underrepresented and/or excluded by our political system including people of low income, people of color, people with disabilities, and people who identify as part of the LGBTQ community. The ASWWU rejects these barriers and our work to break them down starts with elimination of requiring residents to put a stamp on their ballots. The Whatcom County Auditor, the office charged with overseeing elections, has the power to work with students in order to make it so the postage on ballots is prepaid.

**2) Please fill out a Strategy Chart.**

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

**1. Is it winnable?**

Yes, county auditors all over the state have backed this proposal and the State legislator has been working on various voter accessibility issues. Other counties in Washington state have print-at-home ballots that do not require postage.

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

Yes. The number of students who are registered to vote and who actually turn out to vote are the greatest contributors to student power on any given issue. With the elimination of required postage, students have one less barrier to exercising their power at state, local and federal levels of government.



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3. Does it have a clear target?

Yes. The County Auditor and State Legislator.

4. Does it build a measurable amount of power?

Yes. Students who understand that needing postage for a ballot greatly undermines the ability to have their voices heard are often enraged by the idea of having to acquire and pay for postage.

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

Yes. These issues are currently being debated at a state level along with many other voter accessibility issues so this issue had the potential to make progress this year and next year.

6. Does it have a local/state/federal organizing and lobbying angle?

This issue has both a local and state lobbying angle. Starting with local and getting the auditor on board, this would also put momentum behind students lobbying on this issue at the state level

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

Yes. This issue has the potential to impact many communities on our campus. Offices and clubs working doing work on social justice issues and student representation would likely be most interested in this issue. Removing the paid postage requirement increases accessibility to voting, giving people more access to any issue brought up by elections and ballots.

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

Yes. SB 5344 and HB1724 have gained significant traction this year and precisely align with ASWWU's work on this issue.

9. Will it strengthen and expand efforts within the ASWWU?

Yes. Winning the battle for pre-paid postage has the potential to allow students to turn out to vote in greater numbers, and in turn, higher voter turnout would give more power to students lobbying on any given issue.

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

ASWWU is able to boast having registered more students to vote than any other campus in the state combined. This year the number of students registered on campus was upwards of 3,000 students. These numbers provide ASWWU with credibility when lobbying at state/local and federal levels. However, voter turnout of WWU students is not nearly as high. We attribute part of the problem with voter turnout to the barriers to the political process that students face, lack of pre-paid postage being the most important one. With greater turnout of voters, the ASWWU could more affectively advocate for student issues at each level of government. County auditors throughout the state are starting to get on board with the idea of providing pre-paid postage and many lawmakers in Olympia are also advocating on behalf of eliminating postage requirements. ASWWU aims to work at the local level, gaining the support of the Whatcom County Auditor in order to more effectively battle this issue at a state level.



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11. What creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage the media and excite new students around this issue?
- Creating a simple yet effective way to emphasize how this issue relates back to student's ability to work on any other issue
  - Bring it to people's attention via social media that other counties and states do not have to pay for postage via poster or infographic
  - Make a short video or audio piece asking students if they know where to get stamps/how much they are/ask them if prepaid postage would make it easier to vote
  - Create a graphic/whiteboard photo campaign/social media campaign about how rarely students use stamps/how few students know how and where to buy them
  - Emphasize the ways in which poll taxes have historically marginalized communities in order to keep their voices out of elections- building a student consciousness that we are currently part of this process