

Issue: VOTE

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Endorsements: ASWWU Legislative Affairs Council, Western Votes!

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

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 few last years.

#### Automatic Voter Registration

This legislation would ensure that in departments that require proof of citizenship would also automatically register people to vote, Hopefully including institutions of higher education and the department of licensing when the licensing format is updated to include citizenship requirements.

#### Landlord Voter Registration

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

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

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 disadvantaged 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**

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. Right now, two signatories are required each time someone who is unable to sign their ballot votes. Streamlining this process would greatly increase access to voting for people with disabilities.

**Voter Registration Requirement for Institutions of Higher Education**

This legislation would require each institution of higher education to adopt plans to increase voter registration and voter turnout. This legislation would help to make voting accessible to all student across the state and make voting rights and turnout a priority to institutions. The WS A already serves as a resource for people doing voter registration work on their campuses and voter registration drives have been increasingly successful but legislation is important to support these efforts.

**Prepaid postage**

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 stamps 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.

2) Please fill out a strategy chart:

GOALS	ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS	CONSTITUENTS/ ALLIES/ OPPONENTS	TARGETS	TACTICS/TIMELINE
Long Term: Get all of the proposed voter access legislation passed and signed into law.	Haves: WSA represents 13 campuses and has legislative liaisons on the ground during session; represents 150,000 students in total and runs voter registration drives on campus to engage students in the process of electing these folks; actually doing the work on the ground and registering thousands of students every year contributes to why voter	Constituents: Constituents and allies are students, young people, and people with marginalized identities who have historically had barriers to voting or voter registration	Primary: Our primary targets are Senator Roach and Senator Benton.	Educational: Voter guides that have track records of how legislators have voted in the past; building strong voter registration drives on each campus to show that we're doing the most that we can to provide access and need legislation to back it up; talking to student groups and committees to

	access is important to us; have capacity to create one pagers; funding from the organization and capacity to support folks who are tracking this issue; capacity to have students testify on bills; have student groups on campus capable of phone banking and doing other actions to demand movement on this legislation;			educate about exactly which issues are problems when it comes to voting and how close we are to getting some of these things passed
Intermediate: Have them pass out of the Senate Government Operations and State Security committee.	Wants: Increased realization of the lack of access for students, and specifically students of marginalized communities and their increased barriers to voter registration; higher numbers of students registering to vote on campus in the coming year (it's an election year, this should happen anyways) and having those students actually vote; students rallying around accessibility issues and showing that they value their right to vote	Allies: depends based on specific legislation	Secondary: All of the other members on Governmental Operations and Security Committee. Senator Schoesler, the Senate Majority Leader.	Power: Hosting phonebanking, letter writing campaigns, actually getting students to turn out to vote on campuses and voting in legislators who will support voting access Senator Roach and Senator Benton: Have constituents and their families to reach out to the senators about the importance of voter access. This is probably effective for all of the senators. Have individual campuses and other members of the Vote Coalition have of days of action surrounding Voter Access and the proposed bills.
Short Term: Have bills reintroduced in committee so that we can begin advocacy and pressure on legislators to move them forward	Obstacles: Unfortunately voting access has become a partisan issue; folks might not see the barriers to voting and registering to vote because in an election year more people are bound to pay attention and therefore voter reg numbers and voter turn out will be much higher than usual; must keep the focus on who does and does not have access to voting and registering and why this is a problem	Opponents: A few of the Legislators on on the Senate Governmental Operations and State Security as well as Ways and Means. Republican senators have been opposing in recent years so even when bills make it out of the House they do not become law because of the back up in the Senate.		

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

1. Is it winnable?

These issue are winnable, they will just need to be discussed advocated for over longer periods of time like most issues. We have created a lot of momentum on these issues in the past biennium.

\*For further info see question 7.

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 in the last biennium and we should be able to quickly get legislation on these bills introduced and build support for these issues early on in session.

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 WS A 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 issues are likely to be debated and acted upon next session. They've been discussed the last few session and with pressure from stakeholders, the conversation will likely continue.

8. Will it strengthen and expand efforts within the WS A?

Incredibly so, WSA already has a 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?

In the last session:

- Motor Voter passed the House and made it to committee in the Senate.
- Automatic Voter Registration passed the House but failed to be voted out of committee in the Senate.
- Landlord voter registration did not make any progress but had bills introduced in both chambers.
- The Voting Rights Act passed the House and did not make progress in the Senate.
- Extending Voter Registration Deadline has made progress in the House and is being held up in the Senate.
- Access for Voters with Disabilities had a bill introduced in the House, but that bill did not make progress.
- A bill for Higher Education Institutions to have voter registration plans was introduced in the House and Senate and was referred to committee in the Senate but was not heard before the end of session.
- Prepaid Postage bills were introduced but did not make it to committee in either chamber.

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

- Encouraging students to get out and vote this year by providing accessible voter guides about who represents their district in Olympia and their track record with voting on higher education/voter issues.