



PRESS RELEASE

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CHARLOTTE COUNTY LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS URGES CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION TO PUT SINGLE MEMBER DISTRICTS ON 2010 BALLOT

Port Charlotte, May 13, 2010 -- The Charlotte County League of Women Voters urged the Charter Review Commission to put a proposal for a single member election district concept on the 2010 Election Ballot.

The League described the single-member district concept as a move from county-wide Commission elections to single-member voting where only voters living within the boundaries of a Commission district vote in that race. The concept is not radical – it has been done successfully elsewhere in the state, according to Teresa Jenkins, President of the Charlotte County League of Women Voters

Jenkins stated that, “Currently, Commissioners are elected county-wide in an “at large system”; they are voted in county-wide and rule county-wide. Perhaps everyone’s vote is diluted when it comes to choosing their own Commissioner to represent their district”.

The League questions whether the current at-large system is the best means of representing all voters in the County. Jenkins asked, “Are the current five Commissioners representative of the true face of the County when 57% of the voters are registered as “No Party Affiliation” or “Democrat?”

While the LWVCC are in support of allowing voters to decide if a single-member election district is good for the County, they can argue the validity of both sides of the issue.

A single member district has the potential to make Commissioners more accountable to the voters; promote fair representation for residents of a district; and allow elected officials to better represent their communities. “It also has the potential for better representation of under-represented groups,” Ms. Jenkins informed the Commission.

However, a single member district approach could result in only looking at the small picture versus the big picture depending on the structure. “Voters may only cast ballots in one race – does that diminish voter rights?”, asked Jenkins. Depending on how it is structured, there could be less representation of the community as a whole.

The current at-large system coupled with campaign financing laws may shut out well qualified candidates who cannot afford to run in an election. Candidates have to pay for campaign

signs, media advertisement, and direct mailings within five districts to reach over 115,000 registered County voters.

The League is supportive of putting on the November General Election Ballot the concept of single-member districts. If a single member district approach is approved by the voters in November, Jenkins encouraged the Board of County Commissioners to seek input from the public in establishing district boundaries and structure, e.g., single-member district only or a mix of at-large and single member districts.

The League is studying the effectiveness of Florida counties that use a single-member approach and a mix of single-member and at-large Commissioners.

“The bottom line is this: Are citizens getting their fair share of representation under an at-large only system? Perhaps the voters are in the best position to answer that question”, Jenkins concluded.

Contact:

Teresa M. Jenkins, President
League of Women Voters
Charlotte County
lwvcc@comcast.net
941 916-9021

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