

## LWVOR PMP: A Brief History\*

Libby Medley, LWVOR Budget Chair FY85-86 through FY14-15

The challenge of a grassroots organization is operating at multiple levels effectively. The League grew from the national suffrage movement, where the original members—all beginning at the national level—recognized the need for study and action in national, state and local governmental arenas. Financial backing was considered a necessary part of the support for the organization as a whole, and as local Leagues came into being and the organization grew, this expectation continued.

“Until 1926 the state League was supported by donations and dues, which were \$1.00. ... After the Portland League was organized, the Portland and Salem Leagues paid the state 50 cents per member and Portland shared its income from money-raising affairs—teas, bridge and mah jong parties, and lectures.”

State League support for the national organization was decided at the state “Annual Meetings” (now we call them Conventions), and in 1929, the Oregon League voted to raise the national contribution from \$100 to \$150. The national level struggled during the depression, and “between 1931 and 1933 the budget was cut by more than half and many services had to be eliminated, including visits to state and local Leagues and the ‘Voters’ Service’ radio program. Oregon rejected a national proposal for a \$1.00-per-member payment but agreed to increase its contribution from \$150 to \$180, with a promise to try to make it \$200.”

In 1939 the Oregon state Convention “did away with the 50 cents-per-member payment from local Leagues and adopted quotas instead.” Tough times during the Second World War and gas rationing in particular took their toll on the state League, where several state board members resigned during 1942-43. Financial support from state board members was reduced in 1944 from \$1,000 to \$650, hoping local Leagues “would take a more realistic view of the League’s financial needs.” The convention ended up adopting an unbalanced budget, and hard feelings among members was created over what was a fair share of monetary support from local Leagues.

Meanwhile, the need for structural change at the national League level led to the adoption of sweeping changes in 1946, when the National League of Women Voters became the League of Women Voters of the United States, and instead of an alliance of state organizations, it became an association of members, with representation at conventions based on local membership instead of the size of congressional delegations. The functions of state Leagues were “to keep local Leagues informed about issues and coordinate their activities, organize new Leagues, support legislation at the state level, hold state conventions, and develop financial programs ‘to further the work of the League as a whole, including transmission of funds adequate to support the national budget.’”

“In the 1960s the state League still relied on local League pledges for most of its support, but with local dues kept low (\$3.50 in East Multnomah in 1961), inadequate pledges were a problem. ... The state budget was reduced from \$10,000 to \$8,330 in 1961, but after it was pointed out that the 34-page *Outlook for Work* had required at least 11,220 turns of a hand crank, the board decided to buy an automatic mimeograph machine on the installment plan for \$551. ... Starting in 1966 the state League was able to supplement its income with network election coverage projects, when League members observed voting in selected precincts and reported the turn-out, first to NBC and then to ABC network headquarters.”

“At the 1973 Convention, after Oregon had accepted its national pledge of \$5,000, the roll call of pledges from local Leagues was \$700 short. At that time there was a complex formula for setting pledges, taking into account the age of the League and economic conditions in its area. The minutes report complaints from small League[s] about large Leagues that refused to accept their quotas while at the same time they campaigned for adoption of extra program items.”

The current Oregon Per Member Payment (PMP) system was begun in 1977, based upon a system established at a national Convention for the LWVUS. The amount of PMP is established by the delegates to Conventions as a part of adopting state and national League budgets. The initial LWVOR PMP in 1977-79 was \$8.50, and has slowly progressed to the current \$30.50, adopted in 2015, after eight years of holding steady at \$25.00 followed by six years of holding at \$27.50.

As with the original founders, there is strong support among members to provide funds to all levels of League, realizing that we are all one organization. As history has shown, leaving it to voluntary donations or even a pledge system left many members feeling that the apportionment was unfair and/or inadequate. The PMP system allows delegates to assess the rate every two years and make adjustments, as they feel necessary. **PMP may only be changed at Conventions, where a larger representation of the membership is present to make decisions.**

Any individual Convention delegate may make a motion to change the PMP assessment. They should be prepared to indicate how they would alter the proposed budget to address their change. The Budget Committee Chair will be available to work with them in understanding the budget and assessing the impact their proposed changes could have on various line items and the program of the League as a whole.

**THE BOTTOM LINE IS THIS:** we are a grassroots organization, where the local membership retains control of all levels of the League. The state board works to fulfill the responsibilities that the local membership has given it, guided by the actions of Conventions and Councils. In order to accomplish this work at the state level, volunteer and financial support are needed and expected from the grassroots membership.

With regard to the current PMP level, in the last completed fiscal year (July 2013-June 2014), \$23,558 of total state League (LWVOR and LWVOREF) income was from PMP assessments, out of a total state income of \$121,955, or less than 20% of the total raised. While lacking a Development Chair to take on the responsibility of seeking new funds in the past few years, the state board and its committees have worked hard to provide funding beyond the PMP assessment to cover the expenses for the work that members have entrusted to its care, with less than adequate success.

The state leadership continues to be open to new ideas for financial support, and urges local League involvement as they fulfill their commitment to raise \$12,000 beyond PMP to support the consolidated budget adopted in May 2015. Working together, we can capitalize on the tax advantages to donors from our nearly completed state League consolidation by involving more of those who benefit from our work in its financial support. Furthermore, Leagues should keep in mind that their PMP assessments do not have to be funded with membership dues income, either.

\*Quotes are from *More Power Than We Knew: The League of Women Voters of Oregon 1920-1995 Second Edition* by Mary Alice Moore and Donald E. Moore (original text) and Marge Easley, Jane Gigler, Libby Medley and Kris Hudson (update text).