AS WELL AS YOU SIGN – OR, THINK BEFORE YOU INK

The League of Women Voters of California encourages its members and the public to be cautious during this period of circulation of initiative and referendum petitions.

Voters are often asked to sign a petition “just to get it on the ballot so people can vote on it.” The League says to voters, “Your signature is valuable, perhaps even more valuable than your vote. Why? Because far fewer signatures are required to qualify a measure for the ballot than votes needed to pass it once it’s on the ballot. Only sign a petition for an initiative or referendum that you believe belongs on the ballot.”

The LWVC suggests six questions voters should ask themselves to help determine whether or not to sign an initiative petition:

1. **Is it complex?** Some issues can be decided by a simple yes or no vote. More complex issues may be better handled by thorough examination and debate in a legislative arena.

2. **Is it confusing?** Some initiatives are not well written or contain conflicts that may require court resolution or interpretation.

3. **Does it belong in the Constitution?** If an initiative amends the Constitution, consider whether it really belongs there. Is it a fundamental law that should be protected from change? Correcting a constitutional amendment later would also require amending the Constitution, is cumbersome and costly, and requires another vote of the people.

4. **How will it be funded?** Is it an “unfunded mandate” that would require the legislature to take funds from other essential programs? Consider the effect on the overall flexibility of a government budget with already limited revenue. An initiative should generally define its own revenue source, and not earmark, restrict, or obligate a specific percentage of the General Fund revenues.

5. **Before you sign, ask about who is circulating the petition.** Many initiative campaigns use paid signature gatherers. The only requirement in California is that the petition itself have a disclaimer that it may be circulated by a paid signature gatherer. You can ask whether the person requesting your signature is paid, and if so, how much.

6. **Who is behind it?** It can be difficult to find out who the real sponsors and opponents of a petition are. Sometimes there are news reports, or a Web site that can help you. Contribution and expenditure reports of committees organized for action on ballot measures are available through Cal-Access, the automated lobbying and campaign disclosure system sponsored by the California Secretary of State’s office. Go to this site – www.cal-access.ss.ca.gov – to read the financial reports of campaign committees.

The League of Women Voters is a trusted, nonpartisan political organization. Our members do the hands-on work that safeguards democracy and leads to civic improvement. More information about the League, including membership information, can be found on the League’s Web site, www.lwvc.org.