

NOTES
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, October 14, 2008

555 N. Wabasha Street

4th Floor Boardroom

St. Paul, Minnesota 55102

8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Members present: David Alden, Jim Boyle, Janna Caywood, Deborah Claesgens, John DeSantis, Bright Dornblaser, Kevin Goodno (co-chair), Scott Halstead, Sandy Johnson, Scott McMahon, Paul Taylor

Staff present: Bob DeBoer, Annie Levenson-Falk

Outcomes:

- Begin short-term policy groups in recommended areas.

1. Introductions

2. Review and approve agenda and outcomes

- We will discuss short-term policy groups (still looking for a more appropriate name for these groups)
 - In short-term policy groups, members consider past Citizens League work in light of policy issues today to help Citizens League understand current issues
 - Today, we'll talk about how big should these groups be, would anyone volunteer to be on one, how the groups should be constructed and run so that advocates don't control the process
 - At the last meeting, we said we shouldn't form small groups in areas where Citizens League doesn't have policy history – would have trouble upholding our guidelines with this kind of group in those situations
 - Group can help keep Citizens League plugged into these issues (not only what's going on in legislature but private sector too), where staff has not had time to monitor them
- Members would like updates on water policy, regional policy
- Next year, we'll have new co-chairs for Policy Advisory – Kevin and Donna have both served 2 years – suggestions of co-chairs from members would be welcome
 - Typically co-chairs have been Board members. It's not necessary that both be Board members, though we definitely want Board members on the committee, and being co-chairs assures they'll attend

3. Clarify purpose and begin to form short-term policy groups in recommended policy areas

- At previous meeting, we decided to do 3 groups:
 - Energy Efficiency and CO2 Emissions Control for MN
 - We had talked about combining the energy group with ethanol, but we need to make sure we have previous work on the topic before making it a short-term group – haven't found any previous work on ethanol yet.
 - 2001 report is the only one we've found so far on energy
 - Energy could be a good cross-section between environment and transportation, areas where the Citizens League has more work
 - Charter Schools
 - Long Term Care
 - How these 3 topics were chosen
 - Came through study proposal process (anyone can propose a topic for study). Policy Advisory Committee chose charter schools and energy efficiency as top choices for short-term policy work. (Other proposals were recommended for study committees, events, Journal articles, etc)
 - Long term care also ranked pretty highly. We have a few reports and recent work, and are working on this topic currently. June workshop (phase 1 of this work) created a lot of energy to work on this. Proposal for funding Phase 2 is in packets today
- We've done 2 short-term policy groups to date
 - Judicial selection – Executive Committee approved a position drafted by this group
 - Instant Runoff Voting – group of members offered general language, but the Policy Advisory Committee found that Citizens League policy history not sufficient to come up with a statement on this issue – would need study committee or other larger project to form a position
- Short term group process
 - Won't put as much efforts into research, balance of committee members, etc. as we would on study committees.
 - Membership depends on volunteers who want to work on it. Members could decide they need more membership and reach out to others.
 - Has to be anchored in work that comes out of things like study committees so we don't get a group of advocates forming policy positions without following the Citizens League's guidelines.
 - Small groups could recommend a study committee if current situation is too different from context when report was written that work needs to go deeper
 - Would short-term groups be constrained to looking at only new information specific to recommendations of old report, or could they go beyond that?
 - They can look beyond but would have to make a case for doing so.
 - E.g. Judicial selection group found that the situation had changed greatly since report was written because of the White decision, so it asked more fundamentally, based on the work we've done: does the judicial system work?

- Short-term groups can go back to the conclusions and general principles of a report and look at the thinking that led to the recommendations, ask “where would that lead us today?” Specific recommendations from old reports not necessarily still relevant.
 - Policy Advisory Committee will have to look carefully at what comes out of short-term groups and make sure it’s based on historic work.
 - Short-term group attempts to produce a current position that we would make public (with Executive Committee approval) and the group could also help push the position.
 - Process would start with staff person going over the Citizens League’s civic guidelines with the group, about how to do the work. Be very careful that people don’t have a preconceived notion of what the solution should be.
 - Ideal is unbiased participants, but that doesn’t exist. Need to recognize those biases and work as a group to make sure they’re balanced and don’t unfairly sway the outcome. (It’s more of an art than a science)
 - Recommendations from short-term group could be flexible – could recommend policy position, questions for further study, other next steps.
 - Short-term group could also pull a narrow area out of a bigger report and say just that narrow area is the relevant part today.
 - Executive Committee has power to approve recommendations of short-term group because EC meets monthly (Board meets only quarterly) and because it’s an update to work that the Board has already approved. EC could choose to refer the approval decision to the Board.
 - We should be as clear as possible about what we’re asking the short-term groups to do and what product we’d like.
 - Paul, Janna, and Sandy will draft a framework/toolkit for the short-term group process and bring it for the committee to discuss at the next meeting – will include approach, milestones, etc.
 - These groups are essentially without staff support, aside from convening the initial meeting and reviewing the guidelines
 - Timeframe: can begin ASAP, but don’t all have to happen at the same time. Hope to start within a month or 2, but it depends on participants – when they’d like to begin, how long they’d like to spend on it.
 - Doesn’t have to be legislatively-focused. Could focus on things that can be changed through business, etc. outside of legislation.
 - Should consider Civic Caucus model to gather input from others electronically – could come up with a proposal and put it out to whole Citizens League email list for comment.
- We’ve applied for a grant that would allow us to get all of our past reports scanned into searchable pdfs that we could put online for members to use – that would really help with short-term policy groups
 - Until that’s up, we’ll provide electronic copies when we have them or paper copies when we don’t for short-term groups.

- What impact to Citizens League studies have on policy?
 - In early 90s, Citizens League was seen by many conservatives as having a liberal bent, but it still had sway.
 - Mid to late 90s, you didn't hear much about the Citizens League at the Capitol
 - While Kevin Goodno was Commissioner of Dept. of Health, one of the biggest policy changes in mental health was directly related to the Citizens League (work that came from the Minnesota Mental Health Action Group, which the Citizens League convened). MMHAG brought together stakeholders in mental health to work out agreements to try to make change, and ended up getting major bi-partisan legislation through.
 - Challenge in MMHAG was that some of the people coming to the table didn't get along – needed to show common self-interest and get people outside their comfort zone. Was successful (would have near perfect attendance at meetings)
 - Not sure if MMHAG is an easily-replicable process. There was urgency in this issue that was necessary in order to get people to give up some of their turf.
 - A lot of behind-the-scenes time spent by staff developing agendas, talking with chairs, etc.
 - In the past, the Citizens League could take report to the legislature and it was almost automatic – today, no group has that status. Need to be more careful about who you include in the process and at what point, etc.
 - Typically, the best policy products come from give and take between people with different perspectives
 - This year's board is recommending leaving vacancies on the board next year because we're trying to do better at balance. One recent failure is that, in looking for diversity, we've looked for new people and overlooked long-time members. We're looking for both.
 - Seems that, to be effective today, need interest from policymakers first. We're playing the role of helping make progress where legislature gets stuck. Citizens League seen as impartial entity when it comes to many of these policy issues.
 - Government is so complex today that legislators don't have time to delve into these issues.
 - In 2004, Gov. Pawlenty asked Citizens League for a study on higher ed. One of the recommendations was for MnSCU to build Centers of Excellence. McSCU did that
 - We do have an impact – we're not wasting our time. Short-term policy groups will help Citizens League be responsive to current issues within our limited resources
- Next steps
 - Paul, Janna, and Sandy will work on framework/toolkit for these groups

- Jim Boyle is interested in long-term care group but would like to discuss it with Bob in the context of current Citizens League work
- Deborah is interested in charter schools group. Concerned because can be a very contentious issue – a lot of stakeholder groups – we'll have to be careful
- Others interested in working on one of the groups should contact Bob

4. Updates

- Water Policy
 - Committee has decided to focus on governance
 - Structure that governs water in MN is very fragmented, and no one body on either the executive or legislative side is responsible for overseeing this.
 - One of the assumptions is that part of the problem is a disconnect between government and citizens on water management. For example, we were able to be successful through regulation to cut down on industrial polluters, but the biggest issue for water pollution today is nonpoint source – the collective impacts of all of us – and our system is not able to handle that.
 - Committee will look at how governance should be changed and what the appropriate roles are of the appropriate levels of government, nonprofits, communities, citizens, etc.
 - Have learned a lot through the process. This study is unique in that committee was explicitly asked to define its own focus. This has been a very difficult process, but it has also been rewarding – not easy to come to decision, but now that we have, that the committee may be more strongly behind it because of the process it took to get there.
- Regional Policy Workshop
 - In the morning, we had small group discussions and some really good products
 - In the afternoon, we bounced these ideas off people who had worked on other policy areas in the morning
 - Found that it wasn't easy – people get very engaged in creating the work but less so in reacting to what others have created
 - In the afternoon, got some good suggestions about how the ideas could be implemented.
 - Some fatigue.
 - Some of the “lowest common denominator” effect – what people will vote for is not necessarily the most creative ideas.
 - Staff is going over the ideas that came out of both the morning and the afternoon, and will put all of them out along with more context (content from morning sessions)
 - Part of the purpose of the workshop was to test process for long-term engagement on this – we're not just saying that the ideas that were voted to the top at the end of the day are final.
 - Turned out to be a good day, McKnight Foundation (the funder) seems engaged in going forward.

- We had initially thought we would have a bigger event, but that actually would have been very difficult with the types of activities we did.

5. Evaluate whether outcomes were achieved

4-5. Good discussion, glad members will be working on short-term group framework. Would have been nice to have made a little more progress towards that at the meeting