

From: Steve Rhoads srhoads@per.com  
Subject: Re: PABIODIV: PA Congressional Delegation's Environmental Scores  
To: PABIODIV@webmail.upb.pitt.edu  
Date: Fri, 25 Oct 2002 17:02:07 -0400 (EDT)

Not everyone views the LCV environmental scorecards as an objective assessment of the posture of our elected officials on environmental issues.

The PA LCV "flunked" Republican state senator Mary Jo White who is the majority chair of the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee. She responded to the evaluation with a press release that was not reported on by any of the media outlets that covered the rankings, as far as I know.

So for the sake of some balanced reporting to this discussion group, I thought you might find the following press release interesting:

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White blasts release of "environmental scorecard"

Text of Sept. 30 press release.

Harrisburg - State Senator Mary Jo White today dismissed a so-called "environmental scorecard" issued by the League of Conservation Voters as divisive, misleading and partisan.

"The idea that the League of Conservation Voters is a "non-partisan" organization is laughable. The members of the LCV often embrace the most extreme position on a particular issue, and then view compromise as a negative" said White. Senator White serves as chairman of the Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee, a position she has held for the past 4 years.

"Many of the member organizations of the LCV rely upon membership fees and contributions from endowments. They often manufacture an impending legislative crisis - only to announce their "success" in stopping it - to demonstrate their worth, and more importantly to justify continued funding," said White. She noted that the group also tends to "pick and choose" votes, with the intention of bolstering Democrat legislators and hurting Republicans.

The Board of Directors is a "who's-who" of individuals with strong ties to the Democratic Party, including a former DER secretary of a Democratic Governor, a legislative staffer for a Democratic lawmaker, and an organization that received funding from endowments with ties to the national Democratic Party.

On September 9, 2002 the LCV endorsed Democrat Ed Rendell in Pennsylvania's upcoming gubernatorial election. The endorsement came despite the fact that Mr. Rendell's opponent, Mike Fisher, has compiled an impressive environmental record, both as Attorney General and former legislator.

"The member organizations of the LCV don't just disagree with people on issues. They paint them as anti-environmental, pro-special interest and in the 'pockets of big corporations and polluters'," said White. The LCV claims to be non-partisan, to just report the votes. But they choose which votes to report, and which votes to ignore. One of the most notable missing pieces of legislation was HB 2044, which increased funding for Growing Greener to \$1.33 billion over 13 years.

"Reasonable people can disagree on issues - but the LCV has no interest whatsoever in a serious debate on public policy," said White.

"Fortunately, most voters see through this. They realize these groups have their own agenda," White said. I'm proud of the bipartisan work we have done in the Senate."

Senator White noted that almost every vote held in her committee over the past 4 years has been unanimous. "We have worked together to improve Pennsylvania's environment, and as a result we have accomplished a great deal. We are focused on results, not rhetoric."

This past June, Senator White submitted a letter to the League of Conservation Voters highlighting important environmental initiatives that have come before the General Assembly this session. The letter also discussed some of the flaws in subjectively choosing which votes or cosponsorships to include in an "environmental scorecard". A copy of Senator White's letter is attached [See below].

CONTACT: Patrick Henderson (717) 787-9684

June 4, 2002  
Phil Coleman  
Executive Director  
PA League of Conservation Voters  
P.O. Box 158  
Harrisburg, PA 17108

VIA FAX: 717-234-7486

Dear Mr. Coleman:

Thank you for your recent letter requesting my thoughts on appropriate actions to include in your upcoming "voting scorecard".

I strongly discourage the League from using co-sponsorships as a means of deciding whether a legislator is "pro" or "anti" environment. In my experience, there are numerous reasons why a legislator may not cosponsor legislation - he/she may personally support the issue, but out of personal preference only cosponsor a few bills. It is also possible to support a bill conceptually but have some specific concerns that must be addressed, or simply miss the co-sponsorship memo in the huge amount of mail that comes through the office.

Legislation rarely is signed into law exactly as introduced (or it's amended into another bill), and can almost never be reduced simply to a "pro" or "anti" vote. To do so would contradict the supposedly open and continuing dialogue - the free exchange of ideas and evolution of a particular issue - that should be involved in policy making. Unanimous votes should not simply be discarded because they are viewed as uncontroversial; indeed often the best policy comes from consensus building that brings all parties together.

Likewise, on decisions that involve the expenditure of public funds I would encourage the League not to simply endorse the "highest" proposed figure - and thereby negating similar but perhaps more realistically priced proposals. This recognizes the fiscal constraints and competing priorities facing the General Assembly, not only this year, but each year. With that in mind, I offer the following proposals in the Senate for consideration (please note that some issues may not be voted upon by the full Senate as of this date, and therefore may not be appropriate for use as discussed above):

- HB 1289 (Pesticide Notification) In 2000 the League included co-sponsorship of this legislation on its list; certainly this is appropriate now that these bills have been voted on by the entire legislature.

- SB 814 (Solid Waste Host Municipality Agreement and Transportation Safety Act) For the first time, this legislation would require the development of a Host Municipality Agreement. The legislation spells out specifically what components must be in such an agreement, recognizing many of the aspects of life that make living near a landfill often undesirable. The legislation gives communities a direct voice in the siting of landfills where one currently does not. As importantly, the bill establishes new requirements for

waste truckdrivers and operators, and empowers the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to remove drivers who pose a risk to the community.

- SB 696 (Storage Tank and Spill Prevention Act amendments) This package increases assistance available to communities to help cleanup spills or leaks that threaten to contaminate water supplies. The package also places increased notification into statute so that communities and individuals receive information in a timely manner.

- SB 1115 (Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Act) Sets standards for environmental laboratories, and requires data submitted to DEP to come from an accredited lab. Increases citizen confidence in data submitted in accordance with state issued permits. Holds laboratories responsible for the data they generate.

- SB 1439 (Alternative Fuels Incentive Grant Program) Increases assistance to public and non-profit entities and individuals purchasing vehicles powered by alternative fuels. Legislation also expands the scope of activities eligible to receive funding to include heating, lighting and other stationary power sources. This legislation is good in that it provides incentives for organizations and individuals to make purchases of items powered by renewable energy sources, which are cleaner for the environment.

- HB 754 (Waste Tire Pile Recycling Act amendment) Builds upon the efforts of the General Assembly to reduce waste tire piles across Pennsylvania. Tire piles pose threats to the health as fire hazards and recently as breeding grounds for the West Nile virus. Recognizes next generation of waste tire piles by requiring an inventory of pile 1,500 to 10,000 in size and providing incentives for community tire cleanup days.

- HB 1830 (Sewage Treatment Plant and Waterworks Operators' Certification Act) Brings Pennsylvania into compliance with federal law, ensuring that federal Safe Drinking Water Funds are not jeopardized. Increases professional requirements for operators of wastewater and public drinking water treatment facilities.

Thank you again for requesting my thoughts on important environmental legislation before the General Assembly. All votes of the Senate and its committees are public records. If you require information regarding specific votes in the Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee, please contact my office as needed.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo White  
Chair, Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee

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The Pennsylvania Biodiversity Listserve encourages open discussion about biodiversity issues in the state. It is hosted by the Allegheny Institute of Natural History, University of Pittsburgh-Bradford and is moderated by the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership. The opinions expressed in messages are those of the authors and NOT the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership.