

Study Guide – April, 2018
Omnibus Bills: Democracy in Action?

- Please urge members to bring their electronic devices so they can access the April *Voter* article on the topic. It is available at https://lwvmpls.org/wp-content/uploads/Apr_2018_Voter_Final.pdf. It will help if the group leader sends members the list of materials, so they can access websites.

Encourage them to read “Everything you need to know about omnibus bills, and why they're so popular at the Minnesota Legislature,” Briana Bierschbach, March 31, 2017, *MinnPost*, <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/03/everything-you-need-know-about-omnibus-bills-and-why-theyre-so-popular-minne>

1. Review How a Bill Becomes a Law <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/howbill> - Discuss how it is supposed to work.
2. Note: LWVUS Position - *Governmental bodies must protect the citizen's right to know [what the government is doing] by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.* Consider where citizen participation is possible in the legislative process described in How a bill becomes a law – beginning w/ the idea for a bill and including personal lobbying of legislators.
3. Review the *Voter* article – make sure everyone understands what an Omnibus bill and a Conference Committee are.
4. Review the information directly below the box of definitions – understand the two kinds of omnibus bills: Committee omnibus bills and riders to appropriations bills.
5. Review the major points in Bierschbach's *MinnPost* article. Note there is a list at the end of the omnibus bills in process at the end of March, 2017. You can click on the bill number and get to the legislature's site on that bill. Members will also note that each house had omnibus bills, which required conference committees to reconcile.
6. Review the Materials list.
 - Members w/ a legal bent will be interested in the LWV toolkit and amici curiae brief in [Otto v. Wright County](#). This case is based on the constitutional prohibition of more than one subject in a bill.
 - Many will be familiar w/ Prof. David Schultz from “Álmanac”; they might be interested in his blog on the Otto case.

*** Judge Jack Davies' main suggestion at April's Civic Buzz for improving the situation was for LWVMN to study legislative procedures and recommend modifications, since LWV the only group w/o a financial interest in legislation. The judge has many ideas on how this could be done.

What this would mean is updating or fleshing out LWV's position on the Organization of Government: *LWVMN Position: Support improved structure and procedures for the Minnesota Legislature and executive branch.... Support: ✓ Legislative reform through improved procedures for providing information.....*

Only LWV MN, at convention, can initiate a new study or update. Studies are proposed by LWV members who have a keen interest in an issue affecting the League's mission. It is clear that present legislative procedures prevent the public from knowing what their government is doing and from taking part in the process, violating not only LWV positions, but democratic principles.

What does your unit think of his suggestion?