

## NON-PARTISAN POLICY (7/3/20)

The League of Women Voters of the United States has a national policy of non-partisanship, which over the years has proven to be one of the League's greatest strengths. In League context, non-partisanship means that the League, its local chapters and their representatives neither support nor oppose a party or candidate.

This policy applies to a person who has been elected, appointed, is acting, or has been nominated to be on the Board of Directors and to any members who represent the League before the public. This policy covers both individual and group responsibilities of Board members. The policy applies to our words and actions when we represent ourselves--and whenever the public sees us--as a representative of the League.

For the League of Women Voters non-partisan means words and actions are not influenced by a party or candidate or in support of or opposition to a party or candidate. This applies to both the perception and image of the League and to the reality. Because the League is a political organization actively engaging in advocacy for and against government legislation and ballot measures, and sometimes taking positions that coincide with or appear to endorse a party's or candidate's position, it is sometimes seen to be partisan. However, the League's advocacy is always based on League positions that are adopted at the National, State, Regional or local level after member study and consensus.

### EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

In order to protect our reputation of impartiality, the League also makes a distinction between League education and advocacy work. For example, League members have been encouraged to have different League leaders wearing the education hat than those who wear the advocacy hat, and we discourage speaking about the League's positions for or against ballot measures and legislation at any meeting where the pros and cons are being presented.<sup>1</sup>

### DEFINITION OF LWV EDUCATION

Presentation of information about an issue or ballot measure that presents all sides.

### DEFINITION OF LWV ADVOCACY

Presentation of information about an issue on which the League has a position and about which we are advocating particular voter action.

### IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Responsibilities of Individual Directors and Representatives:

Board members and League representatives must remain nonpartisan at all League meetings and at all public appearances when representing the League. When expressing a personal partisan view, a League member must do so as individual not as representing the League.

A Board member wanting to be active in a partisan campaign should follow the guidelines below. In borderline cases, the Board member should bring questions about political activities to the Board to request prior approval.

1. An LWVO Board Member may with Board approval (See exceptions in 3. below)
  - a. Hold an appointive office while serving on the Board;
  - b. Recommend and support a candidate for appointive office;
  - c. Hold a Board position while that member's spouse is serving in or running for elective office;
  - d. Participate in events if the purpose is to become informed about a candidate or an issue in an election
  - e. Support a political party or candidate for elective office provided the Board member's name is not in the public eye, e.g., attend a local organization's meeting, work in partisan headquarters, or attend a fundraiser (paid admission) for a political party or a specific candidate for elective office. Note: a Board member should not "advertise" her/his Board position while doing political work.
  - f. Attend an event with paid admission to support a ballot measure already supported by the League
  - g. Be an active member of a political club
  - h. Distribute League **educational** materials at public meetings including partisan rallies. Note: LWVO Board approval is required before a Board member may distribute other League materials such as position papers at a political party or elective candidate's meetings.
2. An LWVO Board Member may not:
  - a. Run for or hold elective office while on the Board
  - b. Be an officer of a political club
  - c. Appear as an endorser on public campaign literature while identifying her/himself as a League member. Note: This does not preclude contributing to a candidate or political party or being listed as a contributor in the public record.
  - d. Identify ~~her/himself~~ as a League member in publicly expressing an opinion that is in opposition to a League position, such as position supporting or opposing a State or local ballot measure. e. Ever circulate petitions or other campaign-related material at LWV meetings and events for any candidate or on a topic for which there is no LWV position.
3. In addition, the President, Voter Service Vice President and Chair(s), and other Board members who regularly identify themselves as League spokespersons may not:
  - a. Work in a partisan headquarters
  - b. Attend a fundraising event (paid admission) for a political party or a specific candidate for elective office; Participate in a campaign that is in opposition to a position supported by the local League.

## GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

It is a local Board's duty to see that the nonpartisan policy is enforced, that what it does and what it says are not influenced by a party or candidate, or in support of or opposition to a party or candidate.

A Board member or LWVO representative ensures that the community and League members themselves cannot reasonably infer that the League is supporting or opposing a political candidate or party.

In exercising its judgment, the Board takes into account the local situation, member and community understanding of the League, and community attitudes towards politics. The Board retains the option to consider and approve individual Board member requests for flexibility or special consideration in relation to any of the guidelines above.

*[Adopted June 2007, reaffirmed Sept. 2008. revised Sept. 2009, revised July, 2011, re-affirmed July 2012; revised August, 2013; re-affirmed Aug. 2014; Revised Oct. 2015; re-affirmed Aug 2016; re-affirmed July 2017; re-affirmed August 2018, reaffirmed July 2020.]*

## Frequently Asked Questions

*Can I distribute materials?*

YES - You can distribute at a public and non-League meeting, including a partisan meeting educational material that represents all sides of an issue and advocacy material on an issue for which the League has formally adopted a position. To preserve our nonpartisan character we prefer wherever possible that education outreach be separate from advocacy NO – At League meetings you cannot circulate petitions for an issue for which there is no LWV position or solicit support or for any candidate.

[Note: You need approval to distribute materials other than educational (including position papers) at a party or elective candidate's meeting.]

*Can I endorse someone for appointive office or hold one myself?*

YES – You can recommend and support a candidate for an appointive office; however, you need prior approval to hold an appointive office yourself.

*Can I hold elective office?*

NO – You cannot run for or hold elective office while on the Board

YES – your spouse or partner can run for or hold elective office

*Can I be active in a Partisan/Political Party:*

YES – You can personally support a political party (see Section 1e in full version) NO – You cannot hold an office in a political party while on the Board or have your name in the public eye; you cannot “advertise” your League Board position while doing partisan work; your name cannot appear as an endorser on a contributor list or on public campaign literature, if identified as a League member.

YES – You can speak publicly or write on behalf of a political party, elective candidate, or an associated issue, as an individual but NO you cannot do so while identifying yourself as a League member, or if you are regularly identified as a spokesperson for the League.

*What are the additional restrictions for President/Voter Service Vice President and Chairs/League Spokesperson?*

NO – You cannot work in partisan headquarters

NO – You cannot attend a fundraiser for a political party or elective office

NO - You cannot participate in a campaign in a position in opposition to a League position