

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE PIEDMONT TRIAD



Member Handbook 2011–2012

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League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad

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Contents

LWV mission and organization	p. 2	Policy Positions LWVUS	p. 5-7
How the LWV works	p. 2	Funding the work of the LWV	p. 7
LWV Principles	p. 3	Policy Positions LWVNC	p. 8-10
Consensus	p. 3	Policy Positions LWVPT	p. 10-11
LWVPT's Education & Advocacy	p. 4	Nonpartisan Policy	p. 12

The League of Women Voters Mission and Organization

Mission

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Organization

League organization parallels the three levels of government: local, state, and national. Membership in a local league automatically confers membership at the state and national levels. With that member-

ship comes the opportunity to work on program issues at every level.

Membership

Any citizen over 18, male or female, may become a voting member of the league. Associate membership is available for younger people or noncitizens.

Financing League work

The league is financed through contributions and membership dues. Local dues are shared with state and national. □

How the League Works

Member participation is central to the work of the LWV. Members choose issues for study at annual meetings or state and national conventions.

During the study period members read about the issue, listen to speakers, participate in discussions, and sometimes tour facilities. After thorough study, members answer questions on the issue.

On the basis of answers received from members, the league board decides if a consensus has been reached. If so, a policy position is drawn up.

A league "position" is defined as: (1) a set of guidelines by which proposed government action can be measured; or (2) an expression of league goals against which proposed government action can be evaluated.

After defining a position, league boards study proposed legislation or regulations to plan action in support of that position. They decide whether to support or oppose proposed measures on a specific issue. They also have the flexibility to work with others to achieve our goals.

League action occurs at every level of government. Action can also be taken in support of our Principles.

Only the board speaks officially for the league. However, members are "called to action" also. They write letters to the editor or call/write their elected representatives. They speak for themselves but express support of the league's policy position and current action. □

Principles

The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.

The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes that effi-

cient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems. The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems and that development of international organizations and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace. □

Where Do the Principles Come From?

The Principles are “concepts of government” to which the league subscribes. They are a direct descendant of the Platform, which served from 1942 to 1956 as the national repository for “principals supported and positions taken by the league as a whole in fields of government to which it has given sustained attention...” By 1956, the Platform had disappeared from the league vocabulary, but the principles survived as “The Principles.” Since then, the Principles have served two functions, according to the LWVUS bylaws: 1) authorization for adoption of national, state and local program (Article VII), and 2) as a basis for taking action at the national, state and local levels (Article VIII).

As for action to implement the Principles, the appropriate board authorizes action once it determines

that member understanding and agreement do exist and that action is appropriate. As with other action, when there are ramifications beyond a league’s own governmental jurisdiction, that league should consult other leagues affected. The national board suggests that any action on the Principles be taken in conjunction with current league positions to which they apply and on which member agreement and understanding are known to exist. The Principles are rather broad when standing alone, so it is necessary to exercise caution when considering using them as a basis for action. Furthermore, since 1974 most of the Principles have been an integral part of the national program, most notably in the criteria for evaluating government that appear at the end of the formal listing of program. □

What is Consensus?

Consensus is the process the League uses to reach member agreement on study issues. It is neither a simple majority nor unanimity; instead it is an overall sense of the group. In other words, it represents common ground and agreement in the members’ answers to study questions. It can be called “collective opinion or concord.”

LWVPT's Education and Advocacy

The work of the LWVPT involves both informing members and the public (education) and taking action to influence legislation at all levels of government (advocacy). Advocacy is based on policy positions formulated by the LWVUS, the LWVNC, and by our own LWVPT. We can use positions on any level to support action at the local level. (See the public policy statements that follow.) Specific programs and activities are described below.

LUNCH WITH THE LEAGUE

Our Lunch with the League runs from September through April. It is open to the public and is held in Greensboro at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 607 N. Greene St. Guest speakers focus on particular issues of interest to the league. Sometimes candidates are invited to attend and to speak briefly.

Luncheon invitations, which include the topic for that session, are sent by email to many organizations for distribution to their members. A lunch reservation form is included. Payment for lunch (a reasonable sum) is made at the door. Reservations are unnecessary for those who attend but do not have lunch.

VOTER SERVICE

Voter Service is an important part of the educational efforts of the league; it is aimed at members and the wider community.

We frequently hold candidate forums, which have also been televised and run multiple times on the public access cable channel 8, GCTV.

Election Extra is an LWVPT-sponsored publication that gives information about voting and about candidates running for office. These voter guides have included candidates' biographies, answers to league questions, and information about when and where to vote. Candidates are never endorsed.

In past years, the LWV has been well known for its voter registration drives. This past year, league members registered new voters at American Express and at the War Memorial Auditorium when 750 new citizens were sworn in.

CIVICS CLASSES

Over the years, the LWVPT has sponsored civics classes on particular subjects. These classes have met once or twice a week for several weeks. County and city government, our judicial system, jails and alternatives to incarceration, and health care in the U.S. are topics that have been presented. The classes are open to the public free of charge.

TAKING ACTION

Advocacy can take many forms. The league board may send out a "call to action" to members and the public, asking them to contact elected representatives on a particular subject.

Or, a league member may write a letter to the editor, or speak to other groups in efforts to inform and convince others.

There have been rallies, lobbying days when citizens visit their representatives, press conferences, and more.

OBSERVER CORPS PROGRAM

LWV members have been advocates for and protectors of government transparency for many years. In the LWVPT Observer Program, the trained observer attends a governmental meeting such as the Greensboro City Council, Guilford County Board of Commissioners, Board of Education, or Planning and Zoning boards, notes what happens at the meeting on an LWVPT form and writes a short report. These reports, describing the meeting process and content, are often placed in our *Voter Impact* newsletter and can also generate letters to the local newspaper editors.

Volunteer observer activity helps protect and strengthen the community's knowledge about vital issues.

* * *

Being part of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad is interesting and fun! ☐

Democracy is not a spectator sport!

Public Policy Positions of LWVUS

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive.

Voting Rights

Citizen's Right to Vote. Protect the right of all citizens to vote; encourage all citizens to vote.

DC Self-Government and Full Voting Representation. Secure for the citizens of the District of Columbia the rights of self-government and full voting representation in both houses of Congress.

Election Process

Apportionment. Support apportionment of congressional districts and elected legislative bodies at all levels of government based substantially on population.

Campaign Finance. Improve methods of financing political campaigns in order to ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and promote citizen participation in the political process.

Selection of the President. Promote the election of the President and Vice President by direct-popular vote and work to abolish the Electoral College. Support uniform national voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections. Support efforts to provide voters with sufficient information about candidates.

Citizen Rights

Citizen's Right to Know/Citizen Participation. Protect the citizen's right to know and facilitate citizen participation in government decision making.

Individual Liberties. Oppose major threats to basic constitutional rights.

Public Policy on Reproduction Choices. Protect the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

Congress and the Presidency

Congress. Support responsive legislative processes characterized by accountability, representativeness, decision-making capability, and effective performance.

The Presidency. Promote a dynamic balance of power between the executive and legislative branch-

es within the framework set by the Constitution.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Promote peace in an interdependent world by working cooperatively with other nations and strengthening international organizations.

United Nations

Support a strong, effective United Nations to promote international peace and security and to address the social, economic, and humanitarian needs of all people.

Trade

Support U.S. trade policies that reduce trade barriers, expand international trade and advance the achievement of humanitarian, environmental, and social goals.

U.S. Relations with Developing Countries

Promote U.S. policies that meet long-term social and economic needs of developing countries.

Arms Control

Reduce the risk of war through support of arms control measures.

Military Policy and Defense Spending

Work to limit reliance on military force. Examine defense spending in the context of total national needs.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest.

Natural Resources

Promote the management of natural resources as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems.

Resource Management

Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government.

Continued on p. 6

Public Policy Positions of LWVUS (Continued)

Environmental Protection and Pollution Control

Preserve the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment.

Air Quality. Promote measures to reduce pollution from mobile and stationary sources.

Energy. Support environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize energy conservation, and encourage the use of renewable resources.

Land Use. Promote policies that manage land as a finite resource and that incorporate principles of stewardship.

Water Resources. Support measures to reduce pollution in order to protect surface water, groundwater, and drinking water.

Waste Management. Promote policies to reduce the generation and promote the reuse and recycling of solid and hazardous wastes.

Nuclear Issues. Promote the maximum protection of public health and safety and the environment.

Public Participation

Promote public understanding and participation in decision making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources.

Agriculture Policy

Promote adequate supplies of food and fiber at reasonable prices to consumers and support economically viable farms, environmentally sound farm practices, and increased reliance on the free market.

SOCIAL POLICY

Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans.

Equality of Opportunity

Equal Rights. Support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and efforts to bring laws into compliance with the goals of the ERA.

Education, Employment, and Housing. Support equal access to education, employment, and housing.

Fiscal Policy

Tax Policy. Support adequate and flexible funding of federal government programs through an equitable tax system that is progressive overall and that relies primarily on a broad-based income tax.

Federal Deficit. Promote responsible deficit policies.

Funding of Entitlements. Support a federal role in providing mandatory, universal, old-age, survivors, disability, and health insurance.

Health Care

Promote a health care system for the United States that provides access to a basic level of quality care for all U.S. residents and controls health care costs.

Immigration

The League of Women Voters believes that immigration policies should promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. Provision should also be made for qualified persons to enter the U.S. on student visas. All persons should receive fair treatment under the law.

Meeting Basic Human Needs

Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

Income Assistance. Support income assistance programs, based on need, that provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing, and shelter.

Support Services. Provide for essential support services.

Housing Supply. Support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.

Child Care

Support programs and policies to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it.

Early Intervention for Children at Risk

Support policies and programs that promote the well-being, development, and safety of all children.

Conclusion on lower half of p. 7

Funding the work of the LWV

Member dues and contributions are the main source of support for the LWVPT.

DUES

Dues for 2009–2010 are \$56 for an individual, \$84 for two–member household, and \$28 for students. Does this seem high to you? Here’s what happens to those dues:

Dues paid to a local league are shared with the state and national leagues. For 2009–2010, we will send to the LWVUS \$29.20 for each individual member and \$43.80 for each household membership; and we will send to the LWVNC a per member payment of \$12 for each individual member and \$18 for each household membership.

That leaves us with \$14.80 of each individual member’s dues and \$22.200 of household dues! Not much!

CONTRIBUTIONS

There are two kinds of contributions to the LWV — taxable contributions to the LWV operations, and tax-deductible contributions to the 501(c)3 education funds of the LWV. Tax-deductible gifts to our local league go to the LWVNC Citizens Education Fund. It is held for educational activities for our league. A tax-deductible gift to the LWVUS would go to the LWVUS Education Fund. These education funds are restricted to educational activities and to non-partisan voter service.

FUND RAISING

Over the years, the LWVPT has raised funds in a number of ways. In recent years, we have answered telephones at the Board of Elections on election days. Volunteers, who are trained by election officials, work without pay, but the Board of Elections pays the LWVPT for every hour the volunteers have worked. This has been helpful service to the elections officials, and it fits well with our purpose of promoting informed citizen participation in government. □

Public Policy Positions of LWVUS (Conclusion)

Violence Prevention

Support violence prevention programs in communities.

Gun Control

Protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi–automatic weapons. Support regulation of firearms for consumer safety.

Urban Policy

Promote the economic health of cities and improve the quality of urban life.

Death Penalty

The LWVUS supports the abolition of the death penalty.

At the 2010 national convention, members of the LWVUS approved adding two new study items: Federal Role in Public Education, and Privatization of Government Services. If consensus is reached at the end of the studies, we will have new policy positions on these subjects.

Whatever the issue, the League believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibilities, adequate financing, coordination among levels of government, effective enforcement, and well–defined channels for citizen input and review.

The League of Women Voters of the United States

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Public Policy Positions of the LWVNC

GOVERNMENT

Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive to all citizens and that protects individual liberties established under the Constitution, including the right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

Election laws

Promote measures which safeguard the rights of the voter and encourage clear and democratic election procedures. Promote and support election laws in N.C. which emphasize full participation of all citizens in the democratic process.

Support campaign finance reform through measures such as public financing and voluntary spending limits.

Redistricting

Congressional districts, both houses of the state legislature, county, as well as municipal government districts including boards of education, should be apportioned primarily according to population. Districts should be single-member, compact, convenient, contiguous, and should reflect a community of interest.

Specific standards of fair representation as required by the National Voting Rights Acts should be assured.

The responsibility for redistricting and reapportioning should rest with an independent agency commissioned by the legislature once every ten years; the agency plan (for redistricting) should be submitted for legislative approval without amendment. The independent agency should not be a court.

While the agency should reflect the geographic, racial, and gender make-up of the state population, no elected official should be a member. As a creature of the legislature, the agency should be subject to the Open Meetings Law. Definite provisions should be made for compensation and staff services of the independent agency.

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)

Promote legislation that assures that the candidate preferred by a majority of voters wins the election. Specifically support instant runoff voting for all statewide and local elections.

Nonpartisan Selection of Judges

Promote: (a) nonpartisan selection of judges, (b) the concept of a broadly-based judiciary nominating commission for the selection of well-qualified nominees, and (c) appointment, preferably from the nominees.

Tax Policy

Support an equitable and efficient system of taxation in North Carolina, which will adequately fund needed services at both the state and local levels.

Support taxation in proportion to the citizens' ability to pay.

Support measures that would ensure sufficient revenue to provide needed services.

Support granting tax preferences (exemptions, deductions, etc.) premised on the promotion of the common interest and not upon special interest or favoritism.

Support the removal of the sales tax on food for home consumption; the restructuring of the individual income tax to better reflect the ability to pay; the removal of the three hundred dollar ceiling on the sales tax on motor vehicles, boats, and airplanes; and the adoption of other equitable measures that would ensure sufficient revenue to provide needed services.

Support measures allowing greater autonomy to county and municipal governments in raising needed revenue at the local level.

Individual liberties: reproductive choice

The LWVNC position is based on national consensus and position.

SOCIAL POLICY— HUMAN RESOURCES

Promote social and economic justice, secure equal rights of all, and combat discrimination and poverty.

Criminal Justice

Promote fair and equal treatment of all citizens involved in the criminal justice system, including victims and witnesses.

Continued on p. 9

Public Policy Positions of the LWVNC (Continued)

Promote swift, sure, and fair disposition for every defendant and measures to assure the relief of overcrowding and inmate idleness.

Support improved services to juveniles through mandatory statewide guidelines, special training for personnel, and elimination of interagency fragmentation.

Support improvements in education and/or training for employment and family visitation for incarcerated females, special assistance to handicapped inmates, and increased use of alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent crimes.

Support the establishment of a witness assistance program in every court district.

Support limited compensation for all victims of violent crimes, including services and financial support.

Day care

Promote the availability of quality day care to all N.C. families, regardless of socioeconomic status, through adequate state and federal standards, financial assistance, and monitoring the enforcement of those standards.

Education

Promote quality education for all students through the secondary level, with a continuing emphasis on equalization of financing of public schools and consolidation of school districts, when feasible, to provide for improved administration, better use of facilities, and broadened school instructional offerings.

Support developmentally appropriate early childhood education.

Improve quality of teaching through such means as in-service training, more comprehensive teacher training programs, and higher salaries.

Support appointment of a Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Support increased citizen participation through formation of school site and district public school advisory committees. Continue efforts to improve administrative efficiency and judicious use of funds. State funding should be sufficient to support state curriculum requirements in all counties.

Elder Care

Study the role of state government in meeting the needs of dependent older adults.

Health Care Policy

Promote a health care system for the United States that provides access to a basic level of care for all U.S. residents, including the prevention of disease, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute care, long-term care, and mental health care, and controls health care costs.

Promote the equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology, and a reasonable total national expenditure level for health care.

Housing

Promote equal access to housing for all citizens of N.C. Support adoption of a statewide housing policy and a minimum statewide housing code. Support state initiatives to increase the supply of housing for low-income persons in the wake of decreased federal funding.

Women's issues

Promote economic, social, legal, and constitutional equality for women.

NATURAL RESOURCES – ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest by recognizing the interrelationships of air quality, energy, land use, waste management, and water resources.

Consolidation of environmental regulatory agencies

Natural resources management and waste management regulation must be coordinated and adequately funded to achieve the protection needed for [our] air, water, land, and quality of life.

Water Resources and Quality

Promote high water quality standards and resources management through monitoring, water-

Conclusion on lower half of p. 10

Public Policy Positions of the LWVPT

GOVERNMENT

County Government

Promote a working cooperation among the governmental units in our counties. Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive; that has a fair and adequate fiscal basis; that protects the individual liberties established by the Constitution; that assures opportunities for citizen participation in governmental decision-making.

SOCIAL POLICY

Meeting Basic Human Needs

Health Care

Promote a healthy community that recognizes the import of social, geographic, and political influences.

Promote a health care system for the Piedmont Triad that provides access to affordable, quality care for all residents, including prevention of disease, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute care, long-term care, and mental health care (including substance abuse treatment).

Promote control of health care costs, equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology, and a reasonable total expenditure level for health.

Criminal Justice

Incarceration and Alternatives to Jail

Promote construction of new incarceration facilities that are secure, safe, and with adequate space for medical care, family visitation, classes, exercise, and sufficient number of up-to-standard cells—ideally one person to a cell.

Promote adequate and fair funding through a combination of sources, including county annual budgets and bonds.

Promote alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders, both for those awaiting trial and those who have been sentenced.

Programs that offer alternatives to incarceration must be well designed and appropriate and should meet criteria for measuring success.

Continued on p. 11

Public Policy Positions of LWNVC (Conclusion)

shed protection regulation, basin-wide resource planning, coastal water resource protection, and equitable financing for enforcement of regulations.

Air Quality

Support high air quality through control of pollutants, including hydrocarbon emissions, acid rain, and toxic materials.

Land Use

Support land use policies of statewide and regional application, which would effectively guide development to meet human needs and also conserve resources and protect the natural environment.

Support property tax policies which will pro-

mote the wise use of land to meet present and future needs.

Solid and Hazardous Waste

Support a comprehensive solid and hazardous waste management program which would promote waste prevention, reduction, recovery, and recycling. Oppose the underground storage of hazardous materials. Hazardous waste that cannot be reduced, stabilized, or destroyed should be stored in long-term retrievable storage until adequate technology is available.

Energy

Support policies and programs that will reduce energy use and conserve energy sources.

The League of Women Voters of North Carolina

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Public Policy Positions of LWVPT (Conclusion)

Promote adequate funding of alternatives to incarceration through a variety of sources.

Child Care

Promote creation of day care centers at the parents' work places.

Promote appropriate level of education and qualifications, with adequate compensation, for care providers and staff.

Education

Support system-wide clearly defined educational goals and plans for achieving them. Promote effective, accountable leadership, community-wide commitment to district goals, parental involvement in decision-making, and adequate financing. Goals should include a coordinated curriculum with appropriate grade-level expectations and standards in all subjects; thinking and problem solving skills should be integrated into the curriculum; the needs of each individual student should be met; class size should be appropriate for age and activity.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Water

Promote measures which will maintain good water for human use, including:

- Control of population density in the northwest-

ern quadrant and adjacent to the water reservoirs of Greensboro.

- Encouragement of innovative building patterns, which allow the retention of open spaces and controlled buffer zones along the main tributaries and reservoirs.

- Use of tax revenue for a continuous program of purchasing open space and controlled buffer zones along the main tributaries and reservoirs.

- Measures to reduce sedimentation and storm runoff.

- Conservation of present water supplies by allowing water rates to reflect water costs.

Land use

Sign ordinances

Support sign ordinance measures for Guilford County.

Transportation

Promote development of modes of transportation that provide alternatives to the private automobile, such as a demand-response transportation system, improved bus and taxi programs, and encouragement of carpooling and bikeways.

Support continuation of a multi-modal transportation terminal in downtown Greensboro.

League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad

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Pursue your particular interests

Each member can pursue her or his particular interests by joining a committee or by working on a project focused on those issues or interests. League members find deeper involvement and learning very satisfying.

Lobbying in support of league positions is also rewarding. And, by the way, the League of Women Voters is a multi-issue grassroots organization. It is not a special interest or single issue lobby. Rather the league lobbies in the public interest, speaking out on issues that affect us all — clean water and air, social justice, fair elections, international cooperation, and health care.

Let our membership chair know of your special interests and how you would like to be involved and how you would like to participate. The League of Women Voters is for many of us our continuing education program. Get involved!

The League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad

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League of Women Voters Nonpartisan Policy

The League of Women Voters does not support or oppose any political party or any candidate. It does not engage in any partisan activity. The purpose of this policy is to assure the credibility of the League of Women Voters. Only to the extent that the public and elected officials are convinced of the league's genuine nonpartisanship is the league able to render effective voter service and gain a wide base of support for its positions on governmental issues.

The Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad has adopted a nonpartisan policies and practices for board members — those who speak and act on behalf of the organizations. These are updated from time to time.

While the organization is nonpartisan, league members are encouraged to participate to the fullest in the political process and even to run for office.

Of course, league members should exercise caution, when airing their own partisan views; they should speak as individuals and never in the name of the league.

Any member serving as an official representative of the league should refrain from partisan discus-

sions while representing the LWV. This includes helpers at league candidate forums and voter registration drives.

Once the league (local, state, or national) takes a position on an issue, members may not identify themselves as league members while publicly expressing an opinion that is in opposition to a league position.

If a league member is a paid employee or volunteer for a person holding political office or running for political office, the LWV member may not publicly act as a league representative.

All league members are encouraged to serve on boards and commissions to which they may be appointed. Appointees should be fully aware of league positions as they relate to the commission's responsibilities. If a league member is appointed because of league membership, the appointee should be prepared to state the league's official positions.

League members in the leadership roles at unit and other public meetings have the responsibility to ensure the nonpartisanship of the meeting and its environment. □