

## **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF JANESVILLE, WISCONSIN GUIDELINES FOR CANDIDATE DEBATES/FORUMS**

**The League of Women Voters of Janesville, Wisconsin** is a non-partisan membership organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not endorse, support or oppose any political party or any candidate.

**Definition of Debate/Forum:** A moderated event that includes two or more candidates, appearing concurrently, and staged in a fair manner that does not promote or give an advantage to one candidate over another.

**Debate/Forum Purposes:** The LWV-Janesville sponsors debates/forums in order to advance the organization's goals of encouraging an informed and active electorate and increasing citizens' understanding of major public policy issues.

**Participation Criteria:** Candidates must meet all the following criteria in order to participate in League debates/forums:

- a. The candidate, if elected, must be legally qualified to hold the office under federal and state law.
- b. The candidate must have correctly taken out, circulated and properly filed nomination papers.
- c. Write-in candidates who wish to be included must have filed the appropriate papers with the state.
- d. The candidate must have made a public announcement of an intention to run, have a legally registered committee if required, and have filed appropriate financial reports.

### **General Criteria:**

- a. Only candidates who have met the legal requirements for appearance on the election ballot will be invited. Invitations will be issued in writing and include debate goals and selection criteria. Candidates not on the ballot may seek an invitation; however the burden of proof is on them to establish eligibility no less than 7 days prior to the debate/forum. Candidates must appear in person. Campaign representatives may not substitute.
- b. The choice of location for the debate/forum will be dictated by non-political considerations.
- c. Questions to the candidates will cover a broad range of issues and will not be distributed to the candidates in advance of the debate/forum.
- d. Each candidate will have an equal opportunity to present his or her views.
- e. At debates/forums with a public audience, candidates may display one piece of campaign literature at a table provided for that purpose by the League. The League will insure that campaign literature is displayed separately from any League literature. Candidate

literature handed out at League forums should have the legal disclaimer “authorized and paid for by ....”

- f. It sometimes happens that only one candidate in a contested election accepts a debate/forum invitation or that a candidate cancels a debate/forum appearance after agreeing to participate, leaving the debate/forum with only one participant. If only one candidate accepts the invitation, the debate/forum will be cancelled.
- g. In announcing that a candidate has either canceled his/her participation in a debate/forum, or cannot appear, the League will present the factual reasons given by the candidate, if any, without any editorial comment. If no reason is given by the candidate, the League will simply state that it was contacted by the candidate or his/her campaign and told that the candidate would not be able to appear at the event.
- h. Should a question arise that is not addressed by these guidelines, the League Board will seek guidance, as needed, from the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin.

**Broadcast Criteria:**

- a. Debates/forums will not be edited and will be broadcast in their entirety;
- b. Debates/forums will be broadcast live and/or reasonably soon after they take place.

**Co-Sponsorship of Candidate Forums and for Participation in Forums Sponsored by Other Organizations:**

- a. The use of co-sponsors for candidate debates/forums will be limited. Organizations selected to co-sponsor candidate debates/forums will be perceived by the community as nonpartisan and unbiased; they will never endorse candidates or produce “score cards” for incumbent votes that might be perceived as partisan.
- b. The League will take the lead in organizing debates/forums for which LWV is a sponsor, and any co-sponsoring organization(s) must be willing to follow our rules. Potential debate/forum co-sponsors for congressional and state wide races should be approved by LWVWI.
- c. All debates/forums will follow the League guidelines. In particular, there will be no “empty chair” debates/forums with only one candidate present.
- d. The League may be asked to moderate debates/forums for other organizations. This is permissible as long as the debate/forum is organized to meet the League’s standards for fairness.

Adopted: By LWV Janesville Board, 1-21-2009