

2019 ISSUE PAPER: ELECTIONS, CAMPAIGN FINANCE, GOVERNMENT ETHICS

Position statement

The League of Women Voters of Washington believes that:

- The funding level of the Public Disclosure Committee (PDC) should provide for enough staff to audit all appropriate reports including those of lobbyists. Public education should be a funded function of the PDC.
- Voting procedures should serve the voter with a maximum of convenience, simplicity, and efficiency while insuring that the requirements of secrecy, accuracy, and impartiality are maintained.
- Regular and full disclosure of campaign finances for both ballot issues and candidates is necessary before primary and general elections.
- To ensure accountability, (legislative) procedures should be open and understandable.

The League of Women Voters of the United States supports:

- Public financing of elections, either voluntary or mandatory, in which candidates must abide by reasonable spending limits.
- Enhanced enforcement of campaign finance laws that includes changes to ensure that regulatory agencies are properly funded.
- Restrictions on direct donations and bundling by lobbyists, which may include monetary limits as well as other regulations.

Summary of Issues for the 2019 Legislative Session

In 2019 our work around elections and campaign finance will be significantly different than in past years because of the phenomenal success of our Access to Democracy Agenda in 2018. Priority issues we have been working on for years were finally passed into law. This includes the Washington Voting Rights Act, Election Day Registration, Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), and Pre-Registration for 16 and 17-year-olds. In the area of campaign finance, the Washington DISCLOSE Act was also passed.

In the 2019 session we will continue to build upon the Access to Democracy Agenda, and expand our campaign finance and ethics focus:

- **Requiring more state agencies to enact Automatic Voter Registration.** At this time, only the department of Licensing and the Health Service Agency are required to use AVR. In the next session, we will work to see that more state agencies implement this policy for those they serve who are required to prove citizenship.
- **Providing postage paid ballots for all future elections.** The Governor agreed to fund the cost of postage paid ballots out of his budget for 2018, but this was a one-year trial. Future fiscal support will require legislation.
- **Public financing of campaigns.** Because of the high expense of campaigns, the possibility of running for office is often out of reach for someone who does not have significant personal wealth or access to those who do. It also makes it extremely difficult for a candidate to not accept corporate donations. An alternative in place in other states is to provide some public funds to legitimate candidates. The League was the prime sponsor of an initiative (I-1464) in 2016 that would have done just that.

- **Stopping the PAC to PAC shell game.** The law currently requires ads paid for by independent (non-candidate) expenditures to list the top five contributors. However, this list often includes PACs with unknown names as a way to mask true donors, such as a corporation, that may not want its customers to know that it is associated with the message. We will again support a bill that will increase transparency by prohibiting the masking of political donors and require that the true top donors, corporation or individual, be listed as part of the ad.
- **Closing the “revolving door.”** It is currently possible for a high-level government employee or elected official to leave their job one day and returned the next as a lobbyist. This practice allows undue influence by special interest groups. It also enables the corrupt practice of lobbyists promising lucrative jobs in exchange for a favorable vote from an elected official. We have and will continue to support a bill that requires a one-year cooling-off period before high-ranking government officials, including elected officials, could leave service and then return as lobbyists.
- **Prohibiting international campaign donors.** We’ve seen growing awareness of and concern for international influence on our elections. One way this can be accomplished without detection is via donations from corporations who are at least partially owned by foreign entities. We anticipate a bill that will prohibit corporate donations to campaigns unless they can provide proof that the corporation has at least 50% domestic ownership.
- **Adequate Funding for the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC).** The PDC has an enormous task in tracking and regulating campaign donations and expenditures as well as lobbyists activities. Since its inception it has been underfunded and understaffed. This has made it impossible for it to do random audits and has limited its ability to provide the most effective communication.
- **Expanded public records for the legislature.** In 2018, a very controversial bill regarding public records for the legislature was passed but later vetoed by the Governor. A task force on public records was set up and has been meeting. We anticipate a bill that will result in the legislature being included in most aspects of the Public Records Act. We will work with legislators on this bill and support an effort to exempt personal correspondence *from* constituents from public disclosure. Our principles support active participation by citizens and we are concerned that the potential for such correspondence to become public would have a chilling effect on people advocating to their legislators. We know that the most effective advocacy is someone telling their own stories which often contain very personal information that should not become part of the public record.

LWVWA will be actively lobbying in other areas of democracy including election security, alternative election systems, and census and redistricting. Please see separate pages for more information and contact information for those issues.

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