

2020 ISSUE PAPER: CAMPAIGN FINANCE & GOVERNMENT ETHICS

Position Statement

The League of Women Voters of Washington believes that:

- CF-1:** ...The funding level of the 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.
- EL-4:** Regular and full disclosure of campaign finances for both ballot issues and candidates is necessary before primary and general elections.
- LE-1:** The length and operation of the state legislature should encourage the participation of “citizen” legislators.

LWVUS 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, staffed, and structured to avoid partisan deadlock in the decision-making process
- Abolishing Super PACs
- Restrictions on direct donations and bundling by lobbyists, which may include monetary limits as well as other regulations.

Summary of Issues for the 2020 Legislative Session

Campaign Finance and Ethics

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 to the situation that is in place in other states is to provide some public funds to legitimate candidates.

Closing the “revolving door” (HB 1067) Currently, it is 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 return as lobbyists.

Prohibiting international campaign donors. We’ve seen growing awareness of and concern for international influence on our elections. One way this is done, without detection is via donations from corporations who are at least partially owned by foreign entities. We will support a bill that will prohibit corporate donations to campaigns unless they can provide proof that the corporation has at least 50% domestic ownership.

Supporting 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 and did not have the authority needed to be effective as possible. Each session the League strives to ensure that the agency has sufficient funding for operations. In 2020 the PDC will propose legislation that updates what is required to be reported by elected and appointed officials in their financial affairs statements, prohibits political advertising that includes earlier endorsements of candidates not actually on the ballot, allows direct access to the account dedicated exclusively for the PDC’s use for special projects, without requiring approval

of the legislature. This would allow the agency to more nimbly move forward to tackle the backlog of priority IT and related projects. that will improve the way information must be reported and can be accessed by the public.

Service Leave for Legislators (SB 5294) Washington has a “citizen legislature,” which means legislative service is considered a part-time job that in theory is accessible to all citizens, not just professional politicians. But it is typically dominated by those wealthy enough to not need additional income, self-employed or in a well-paid executive position that offers them great flexibility. A citizen with a full-time job and a moderate income too often cannot even consider running for office. We will continue to support a bill that would require most employers to provide unpaid leave for someone serving as a legislator. This will not only add to diversity of the legislature but provide a much-needed perspective regarding financial issues.

Other Democracy Issues

Please see separate pages for more information on democracy issues that LWV WA lobbies on including **elections, election security, and census and redistricting.**

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