

2020 ISSUE PAPER: ELECTIONS, 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-2:** Voting procedures should serve the voter with a maximum of convenience, simplicity and efficiency while ensuring that the requirements of secrecy, accuracy and impartiality are maintained.
- 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.

Voter Access

Voting rights for those previously convicted of a felony (SB 5076 and HB 1924) Currently, voting rights are restored to those with a felony conviction only after they who are no longer under community custody ("parole"). Further that right can be revoked if they fall behind on paying their legal financial obligations (LFOs). We support having these rights restored upon release from prison and eliminating the connection to LFOs because it disproportionately disenfranchises those with low incomes. It turns voting into a "pay to play" system, which we believe is antithetical to our democracy.

Eliminating Advisory Votes (SB 5224) In 2008, Initiative 960 was passed by voters and included a section requiring that whenever the legislature raised taxes, the ballot for the next general election would include an opportunity for voters to express **their opinion** as to whether or not the tax increase should be repealed or maintained. The ballot does not indicate that the outcome of this vote is in no way binding on the legislature. Because the vote has no impact, there is virtually no information about them available to voters. Information that is available is what is required by this law to be included in the state's Voters' Pamphlet. This includes a short description of the tax increase, 10-year cost projection, and the record of the vote on the bill that contained the tax increase. The Voter's pamphlet does not include any reference to the reason for the increase or information about how the money is being used.

These questions add significantly to the cost of the election, in some cases this cost is more than the amount of the day tax increase itself. In addition to printing, postage and f tallying cost, these opinion polls have a major impact on the cost of the statewide Voters Pamphlet. In odd numbered years where there are no state races or ballot questions, only advisory votes, the pamphlet providing information only about the advisory votes must still be sent to every household in the state.

Other Democracy Issues

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

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