



*League of Women Voters of the Oneonta Area*

## **2017 GUIDELINES FOR CANDIDATE NIGHT PANELS, DEBATES and PRESENTATIONS**

### **Purpose**

- Educate the public about the issues in the campaign(s).
- Provide an opportunity for voters to witness candidates discuss those issues face-to-face.
- Stimulate public interest, and participation, in the election(s).
- Provide an opportunity for the public to engage the candidates.

The League believes these purposes are best served by adoption of nonpartisan, objective, and understandable written criteria for candidate inclusion. To that end, the League will apply the following guidelines in determining whether candidates have the right to participate in League sponsored debates and forums.

### **Definition** of Debate [per the Federal Election Commission (FEC)]

- includes at least two candidates
- does not promote or advance one candidate over another; and
- allows candidates to appear together, in face-to-face interaction, with opportunities to respond to each other.

### **Criteria for Candidate Participation**

- Constitutional Eligibility: Candidates must meet requirements of the NYS Constitution and the Constitution of the United States.
- Ballot Access: Candidates must have met all requirements to be on the ballot according to NYS Election laws. This includes major and minor parties; no write-ins.

Based on the above criteria, our League's Candidate Night planning group will make the final determination of eligibility for participation and offer invitations to qualified candidates.

### **Empty Chair Debates**

According to FEC guidelines, and League standards, a campaign debate or panel requires at least two candidates, in a "face-to-face" forum. No one can substitute for a candidate. Therefore, if only one candidate accepts the invitation, or if only one candidate actually shows up for the slated event at the appointed time, the only option is to cancel it. Under no circumstances can a single candidate for an office be allowed to speak, even if the race is uncontested.

### **Format for Candidate Debates and Panels**

League Members will serve as the event's Host and Debate Moderators, as well as greeters, ushers, timers, etc. After the Debate Moderator introduces the participating candidates, each will have two minutes for

an opening statement, with the order of speaking determined in advance by lot. The overall duration of the debate will be decided in advance and agreed to by all participating candidates. Timekeepers will ensure that candidates stay within their allotted times. The candidates for each event will all be seated at a table, with nameplates.

Questions for the candidates will come from the attending audience and also from a Media Panel. The attending audience will be invited to write their questions to the candidates on cards distributed as they enter the debate area. These will be collected on an ongoing basis through the evening.

Appointed League members and other designees will screen these audience questions in order to avoid embarrassing, non-answerable or duplicative questions. The Moderator will pose these selected questions from the audience. This procedure allows those who wish to ask questions to do so, avoids risk of disruption, and makes optimum use of the available time. It has the added advantage of the moderator's having questions in hand to repeat accurately, if necessary. The Media Panel will be composed of newspaper, radio or TV personnel. They will pose their questions directly to the candidates. The Moderator shall determine the order of questions.

A question may be directed to a specific candidate, or to all. In either case, all candidates will have the opportunity to respond to all questions. Candidate initial responses to questions will be limited to two minutes. After all candidates have given their initial answers, the Moderator will offer all candidates one additional minute to speak on the same issue. This procedure encourages candidates to debate and hold each other to account, rather than having the Moderator assume this role. On major issues, the Moderator may offer each candidate an additional opportunity to speak. The Moderator will move to another question when a topic appears exhausted. The intent of this format, and the Moderator's job, is to be fair to all candidates. This includes varying the order in which candidates are invited to speak. A candidate may decline to answer any question or use all of their allotted time.

At the end of the Q & A period, candidates will make one-minute closing statements, in reverse order from the opening statements.

### **Format for the Candidate Presentations**

The candidates will all be seated at a table, with nameplates. The Event Host will introduce the participating candidates. Each candidate will then have four minutes to present their qualifications, etc. for the office on question, with the order of speaking determined in advance by lot. There will be no questions or responses.

### **Recording**

Only individuals authorized by the League of Women Voters may record these events, and the League owns the content of these recordings. The League may post recordings of these events on League media in their entirety, either as a whole or by individual component. Any use of the authorized recording requires the advance approval of the League of Women Voters, except that other local Leagues may post the recording on their websites. Only licensed media, including TV, radio and newspapers are entitled by FCC regulations to air portions of this recording. No one is permitted to edit any recordings of these events for campaign purposes.

### **Behavior, Appearance and Acceptance of Guidelines**

No campaign signs, buttons, literature, marked clothing, or any other campaign-related paraphernalia will be permitted to be worn, displayed or distributed inside the event venue. All attendees are expected to listen to the proceedings in respectful silence.

### **Agreement to these Guidelines**

By accepting the League's invitation for a proposed debate, a candidate and their campaign agrees to abide by and support all these Guidelines.