



*League of Women Voters of Cooperstown Area & League of Women Voters of the Oneonta Area*

## **2016 GUIDELINES FOR CANDIDATE DEBATES**

### **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, the Debate Leadership Team of our two Leagues will make the final determination of eligibility for participation and offer invitations to qualified candidates.

### **Empty Chair Debates**

According to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), a campaign debate for federal office 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 debate at the appointed time, the only option is to cancel the debate. The FEC regulations are quite clear on this point.

### **Format for Candidate Debate**

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 candidate will make a three-minute opening statement, with the order of speaking determined in advance by lot. Candidates will make two-minute closing statements in reverse order from opening statements. 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.

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 debate.

Appointed League members will screen these questions in order to avoid embarrassing, non-answerable or duplicative questions. The Moderator will pose these selected questions from the audience. This procedure allows all who wish to ask questions to do so without risking disruption. It has the added advantage of the moderator having questions in hand to repeat accurately, if necessary. The Media Panel will be comprised of newspaper, radio or TV personnel. They will pose their questions directly to the candidates.

While a question may be directed to a specific candidate, all candidates will have the opportunity to respond to all questions. Candidate responses to questions will be limited to two minutes. After one candidate has given their answer, the others may, if they so choose, take two minutes to reply to the same point. 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 debate format will allow equal time and be fair to all candidates. A candidate may decline to answer any question.

### **Recording**

Only the recorder authorized by the League may record this forum. The League of Women Voters owns the content of this forum and may post recordings of it in its entirety on League media. 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 footage 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. By accepting the League's invitation for a proposed debate, a candidate agrees to abide by and support all these Guidelines.