



2018 Voters' Guide: State House Candidates for 137th

Welcome to the League of Women Voters of Norwalk (LWV-N) Voters' Guide! The LWV is a national, non-partisan organization that believes an educated voter is a motivated voter. Each year, local leagues throughout the state put together guides to help voters understand where their candidates stand on the issues that impact their city or town. The League solicits information from the candidates by asking them questions that can be answered by all candidates, regardless of their party affiliation. The answers come directly from the candidates and are printed unedited by local leagues.

Here are the unedited responses from the two candidates for the 137th, in alphabetical order:

Candidate Frank Page (R)

LWV: What are your top three legislative priorities? Why these?

FP: My three main priorities in the legislature will be transportation, education, and enacting real pension reform. These all ultimately affect state spending and taxes.

Every state relies on its transportation network to drive economic development and maximize quality of life. Unfortunately, transportation has been ignored for far too long here in Connecticut, which remains a roadblock to economic recovery. I will support legislation that reserves a set amount of General Obligation Bonds to be used solely for transportation priorities, preserve Special Tax Obligation bonds dedicated to transportation, and re-establish the Transportation Security Board to work alongside CT DOT (Connecticut Department of Transportation) to assess proposed projects and identify community needs.

On education funding, Norwalk continues to be short-changed, despite its rapidly growing population and the increasing need for educating English language learners. I will support the creation of a more equitable state funding formula that provides all students a quality education, with a particular emphasis for Norwalk's special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

It is impossible to fix our budget without pension reform. Our unfunded pension liabilities cannibalize the state budget and cause state employees to fear for their futures. This is unacceptable. I will support legislation to move pension and benefits out of collective bargaining and make them statutory. This includes policies to remove COLAs from pensions for employees who retire after 2027 (when SEBAC is set to expire) and also remove overtime pay

from pension calculation for workers who retire after 2027. These policies will make public pensions more similar to private-sector pensions and allow us more flexibility when we budget.

LWV: What alternative revenue streams are you suggesting to keep Connecticut fiscally sound for years to come?

FP: The past eight years have been largely defined by legislators in Connecticut suggesting “alternative revenue streams” in order to plug holes in our budget that inevitably reopen every year. It is time to accept that our state does not have a revenue problem. In fact, we collect more revenue from income tax and sales tax every year. Our legislature has a spending problem, and if I am elected I will go to Hartford as an advocate for taxpayers and make Connecticut more affordable. I will push for budgets that reduce spending by streamlining our government, eliminating layers of bureaucracy, making the most use out of technology to save money, and transferring government services to non-profits. We need to prioritize spending for core government services like education funding to Norwalk and urgently-needed transportation projects. Our state needs a specific and full-detailed blueprint for how we are going to manage our finances going forward with predictability and stability, because plodding along with runaway deficits and using tolls and other tax hikes to plug the holes is irresponsible.

LWV: Would you support establishing an independent citizen’s redistricting commission-- similar to California's-- to draw new legislative district lines after the 2020 Census? Why or why not?

FP: No, I would not support this measure. Connecticut’s current method of redistricting by legislature is currently working for us - if you look at a map of House districts there really aren’t any egregious instances of gerrymandering like you have seen recently in other states such as North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Mostly, legislative districts in Connecticut conform with town lines. Additionally, in Connecticut, there are already safeguards in place against transparently partisan redistricting. Our state courts, who are supposed to fill this role acting as independent arbiters representing the people, must review the new legislative maps. If they find any obvious problems or gerrymandering, the courts send it back to the legislature for redistricting to be redone until the problems are resolved. I also question the true “independence” of these citizens’ redistricting commissions. Who gets to appoint these people? Who can be appointed? Are they accountable to voters? How can we be sure partisanship won’t seep into their decisions? I think a commission like California’s would open a whole new set of problems here in Connecticut. At least here, legislators are accountable to voters every two years and voters can express their dissatisfaction with the people who made the maps.

LWV: What are your ideas on how to increase Norwalk’s share of Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) funding?

FP: Connecticut still does have an equitable formula to distribute education spending among towns. Our current formula, of course, is so irrational that it was actually declared unconstitutional by the State Supreme Court in a 2016 lawsuit. Under the current formula,

Norwalk, which is a growing city, often finds itself lumped in with affluent larger towns like Greenwich, and receives insufficient funding as a result of its location on the Gold Coast. As Norwalk parents know all too well, Norwalk's school system is increasingly diverse - economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically - with very unique needs. For example, although Norwalk is ranked in DRG H, with almost 50% of its students eligible for free/reduced lunch, the ECS system as it currently operates does not consider that fact. It also doesn't take into account the amount of students enrolled in special education or English language learners. If elected, I will cosponsor a plan to more appropriately determine a community's wealth and make sure that formula is applied the same way across the state. There needs to be more outreach to all education stakeholders in Norwalk, including teachers, students, parents, and administrators, so that Norwalk's delegation to Hartford can present a more unified front. Education funding for Norwalk is also intrinsically linked with the state budget. In recent years, Governor Malloy has looked to slash education funding to towns as a means of plugging holes in the budget. Fixing our state budget will allow for more predictability and stability for local leaders while they craft their school districts' budgets.

Candidate Chris Perone (D)

LWV: What are your top three legislative priorities? Why these?

CP:

1. Education funding.
2. Make Connecticut more economically competitive through better prioritization of infrastructure and a push for a balanced and multi-modal transportation system. – CT needs good infrastructure along with reliable bus and rail service in order to compete in the global economy.
3. Modernize the tax code as well as improve budget planning. – Tax policy, when used effectively, should be part of our long term economic growth strategy. But in CT we do the revenue package only after the spending package is done. The revenue package should go first to keep spending in line with revenues.

LWV: What alternative revenue streams are you suggesting to keep Connecticut fiscally sound for years to come?

CP: My main focus is on transportation so I consider revenue streams as they impact the special transportation fund. In short tolls, an increase in the gas tax, and other alternative revenue sources need to be seriously discussed – and not used as political footballs. The consequences of inaction are dire. If we continue the status quo as it relates to transportation it will result in deterioration of our transportation facilities in the next few years, and a significant curtailment of transit services and affordability. So, without new revenues, the state would have no choice but to implement such cuts.

LWV: Would you support establishing an independent citizen's redistricting commission-- similar to California's-- to draw new legislative district lines after the 2020 Census? Why or why not?

CP: Yes. Connecticut currently counts prison inmates as residents of the districts in which they are incarcerated instead of their pre-incarceration residences. It muffles the voices, and votes of residents in the inmates home communities – residents who are disproportionately African-American and Latino. I support the reformation of Connecticut's redistricting commission. As long as this inequity is continually ratified by inaction, then Connecticut cannot say it has a redistricting system that takes into account population and fairness.

LWV: What are your ideas on how to increase Norwalk's share of Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) funding?

CP: I am encouraged that we have a new education funding formula in the latest state budget. But I supported it with the notion that we would accelerate how the state funds public schools with more aid getting to the neediest districts. Like any funding mechanism the proof is in student outcomes. In short, will the funding we receive be enough to give Norwalk schools the resources necessary to educate our students effectively? Making sure our students have the resources they need is my top priority.