

LWVSC NONPARTISANSHIP IN CAMPAIGN SEASON

In 2020 both the South Carolina Senate and House are up for reelection. Nonpartisanship is always a central principle for the League. In campaign season it is especially necessary to be careful.

THE PRINCIPLES

The League speaks with One Voice.

- Those authorized to speak publicly for the League must be especially careful to maintain strict nonpartisanship at all times. Partisan social and other media or other activities are not acceptable.
- All members must be careful to maintain nonpartisanship when involved in League events or other communications, although most members are free to engage in partisan activities independently of the League.

The League supports issues, not candidates.

The League publicly thanks those public officials for helping us with our issues. We do not, however, endorse them independently of those issues.

IN PRACTICE

It is very important that the League publicly acknowledge those public officials who help us achieve our goals. They deserve (and need) recognition for their work. We are grateful for those who make it possible for us to succeed and we express this both in public comments and through League awards.

However, praise must be tied to our issue. “We really appreciate Senator Elmer Fudd’s support for redistricting reform!” is appropriate. “Senator Elmer Fudd is great and we hope he is reelected!” is not appropriate.

The more restricted approach is also realistic. Senator Fudd may be supportive on some of our issues but not on others. It happens all the time. Disagreeing with us on issues is (usually) not a sin, just a difference of opinion. Consequently, it is not only consistent with our nonpartisanship but also realistic to avoid implying that Senator Fudd’s work at the State House is 100% glorious. It probably isn’t.

FAQS: RESPONSES TO SOME SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

- **Do we use photographs of officials or candidates in our promotional or informational materials?**

If you are promoting an issue panel with several legislators a visual related to the theme (dark money, redistricting, whatever) is much better than headshots of panel participants. Your panel isn’t about the officials. On the other hand, if you are advertising a candidate forum, head shots make sense.

Event or action photos are often acceptable. As a reasonable test of a proposed photo, ask whether use of a photo makes the material look like a campaign release.

- **Should we avoid candid photos of officials/candidates at League events? What if some will be running for re-election?**

It is fine to take and use photos of officials or candidates at your events in your newsletters, or other materials, as long as the text/labels are more like “We are very pleased that Senator Fudd could join us” and not “We were delighted that our favorite Senate member, Elmer Fudd, was able to be there.”

- **Should we avoid mentioning the name of a current representative in a headline, or doing an article, for example commending Senator Fudd for helping us on an issue or receiving an award?**

We must thank officials for supporting us on our issues. We simply must not go on to imply that the League thinks they are overall the best reelection candidates.

In the same vein, the LWVSC doesn't give its primary Convention award, which is for general service to democracy, to active officials. We have a separate award system that is specifically tied to thanking legislators for work on a specific issue.

- **What if a candidate uses quotes from us or photos from our events in campaign materials?**

Legislators and other public officials must run for office periodically. To do so, they must produce and distribute campaign materials and ads. That is inevitable. Candidates telling voters what they have accomplished, who they have worked with, and whether their work has been positively recognized by reputable organizations (like the League) is a feature, not a bug, in our system of democratic elections.

So, candidates will list our awards on their official biographies and may refer to it in campaign materials, possibly with photos. They may quote newspaper articles in which a League spokesperson has commended some specific action by the candidate. That is fine. If you haven't said or done anything inappropriate, reference to comments or photos should not be a problem.

Sometimes the public comment occurs in a challenging context. For example, a reporter might ask if a charge by an official's opponent is true, when the League has been involved in the relevant events and has special direct knowledge of the truth or falsity of the charge. In that case, a truthful issue-focused response, confined to the information available to us, is appropriate. For example, we might say “Yes, we were involved in shaping that bill with Senator Fudd, and we are unaware of anything suggesting that the intent of the bill was to harm kittens.” It is important that the comment is focused on our participation and on information to which we have direct access. We can't guarantee the innocence of Senator Fudd's intentions, since we are not mind readers.

- **Should we avoid posting LWV logos, signage, or banners at events in case a candidate takes a selfie with it and uses the photo on social media?**

No, use the LWV logos, signage, banners and other materials at events as you normally would. A candidate having been in proximity to a LWV logo and recorded it for posterity does not constitute League endorsement of a candidate.