

**WELCOME TO THE
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF
TOMPKINS COUNTY**

MEMBERSHIP BOOKLET

Informed and active citizens joining together to explore common problems and identify shared goals, can resolve the tough issues that confront our community, our nation, and our world.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan citizen organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Any person 16 years or older, whatever their gender, may become a League member. The League does not support or oppose any political parties or candidates. It achieves its goals through year-round voter service activities, and study of and action on issues selected by its members on the local, state, and national levels.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Principles of the League of Women Voters (LWV)
 - 2 What is the League?
 - Purpose
 - History
 - Organization and Membership
 - 3 What does the League do?
 - Nonpartisan Voter Service and Citizen Education Studies and Program
 - Action and Advocacy on National, State, and Local Public Policy Issues
 - 4 How does the League finance its activities?
 - 5 Glossary of Selected League Terms
- Back LWV Contact Information (Local, State, National)

PRINCIPLES OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS (LWV)
www.lwv.org; *Impact on Issues*; <http://www.lwv.org/content/principles>

The League of Women Voters believes:

- *In representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.*
- *That all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.*
- *That democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.*
- *That every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination.*
- *That efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.*
- *That responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.*
- *That cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems and that development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.*

WHAT IS THE LEAGUE?

PURPOSE

- To encourage the active and informed participation of citizens in government.
- To increase understanding of major public policy issues.
- To secure public policies that promote LWV goals reached through member participation and agreement.

League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan citizen organization, [open to both women and men], encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not support or oppose any political parties or candidates. It achieves its goals through year-round voter service activities, and study of and action on issues selected by its members on the local, state, and national levels.

HISTORY

The League of Women Voters (LWV) came into being in 1920, the year suffrage was written into the U.S. Constitution. Carrie Chapman Catt was the founder. The League grew out of the National Woman Suffrage Association, which spear-headed the 72-year drive to get the vote for women. As its first task, the League sought to help the 20 million newly enfranchised women to carry out their new voting and civic participation responsibility. The scope was expanded to include service to all citizens.

ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERSHIP

The League functions on three levels - national, state, and local. There is one National League in Washington, D.C., state Leagues in each state, and numerous local Leagues. Joining the League at any level automatically confers membership at all three levels - local, state, and national.

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to women and men who support the purpose and principles of the League of Women Voters and provides the opportunity to be actively involved in local, state, and national issues. Voting members are citizens at least 16 years of age. Household memberships are available for two members living at the same address. Honorary members are persons who have been members for 50 years or more. Honorary members do not pay dues.

WHAT DOES THE LEAGUE DO?

NONPARTISAN VOTER SERVICE AND CITIZEN EDUCATION

Voter Service refers to nonpartisan, year-round activity to help citizens be politically effective and to encourage their participation in the political process. Registering voters, sponsoring candidate forums, and presenting factual, nonpartisan voting and election information (e.g. Voters' Guides with offices to be filled, candidates, voting procedure, ballot propositions) are basic voter service activities.

The League never supports or opposes any political party or candidate for elective office, but encourages its members, as individuals, to take part fully in the political process.

STUDIES AND PROGRAM

Study: The Leagues at each level choose issues for their members to study.

Criteria considered when selecting a study program:

- The issue must be one on which governmental action is needed.
- The issue must fall within the principles of the LWV.
- Funds, time and people must be available to do a thorough job.

If agreement is reached by the membership, after a thorough study of the pros and cons of an issue, then the League has a position and can take action.

Program:

The program of the League is determined by its members and consists of national, state, and local governmental issues, chosen by consensus for study and action. Consensus is the basis of all League positions, which in turn are used as a platform for lobbying the government, on the local, state and national levels.

Impact on Issues provides the official statements of League public policy positions for each program area. Go to the national LWV website, www.lwv.org, to view or print. The League of Women Voters of New York State (LWV-NYS), like the national LWV, reviews its program every two years, at its convention. Go to www.lwvny.org to view or print the state positions.

ACTION AND ADVOCACY ON NATIONAL, STATE AND LOCAL PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES:

Action includes lobbying, testifying at public hearings, holding public meetings and forums, writing letters to public officials and 'Letter to the Editor', working in coalitions, monitoring elections and other government activities, writing publications and press releases, holding press conferences, litigating to clarify laws in the public interest, and disseminating information to the public on national, state, and local public policy issues that the League has positions on.

HOW DOES THE LEAGUE FINANCE ITS ACTIVITIES?

The League is a not-for-profit, but not a tax-exempt organization, due to its lobbying activities. Every local League adopts a budget, which includes support for the State and National League, the per member payment (PMP).

Fiscal Year:

The fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th.

Not Tax-Deductible Funding:

Membership dues and contributions, paid to the LWV-TC, are not tax-deductible.

Tax-Deductible Contributions:

Tax-deductible contributions can be made by writing a separate check payable to the Community Foundations of Tompkins County; and writing "LWV Education Fund" on the MEMO line of the check to ensure that the correct fund is credited.

Tax-exempt organizations with 501(c)3 status receive tax-exempt contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals that are used for education projects and programs. The funds are not used for lobbying or to support legislation. The LWVUS Education Fund and the LWWNYS Education Foundation operate at the national and state levels.

Glossary

ACTION: Promoting the League's positions on local, state and national public policy issues to government officials, the media and the public.

ACTION ALERT: Request from the LWVUS or state League to take action in support of a League position.

ANNUAL MEETING: Local year-end business meeting to elect officers and directors, vote on bylaw changes and vote on the proposed annual budget.

ASSOCIATE MEMBER: A non-voting member of the League, such as a person under 18 years of age or a non-citizen.

CONSENSUS: Collective opinion of a substantial number of League members, representative of the membership as a whole, after objective study of an issue.

CONCURRENCE: Agreement by League members with a position on an issue reached by a small group of members or by another League.

CONVENTION: A state or national League meeting held every other year at which delegates elect officers and directors for the biennium, adopt program, make bylaw changes and adopt a budget, usually for one year. Local Leagues send delegates to state convention; local and state Leagues send delegates to national convention.

COUNCIL: Assembly of delegates held in alternate years to adopt a budget and assess program development. Local Leagues send delegates to state council; state Leagues send delegates to national council.

EDUCATION FUND: The tax-deductible arm of national, state, and large local Leagues, handling funds to be used only for educational purposes, not for action on issues.

HONORARY LIFE MEMBER: A person who has been a member for 50 years or more. Life members are excused from dues payment and their Leagues pay no per member payment (PMP) for them.

PMP: Acronym for **Per Member Payment**, the amount of money paid to the LWVUS and the state League on behalf of each member.

POSITION: A statement of the League's point of view on an issue, arrived at through member study and agreement (consensus or concurrence), approved by the appropriate board and used as a basis for League action.

PRINCIPLES: Governmental standards and policies supported by the League as a whole. They constitute the authorization for adoption of program at all levels.

PROGRAM: Selected governmental issues chosen by members at the local, state and national levels for study and action.

VOTING MEMBERS: All League members who are U.S. citizens and at least 18 years of age or older.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS CONTACT INFORMATION

League of Women Voters of Tompkins County (LWV-TC)

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League of Women Voters of the United States (LWV-US)

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