



League of Women Voters Minnesota Candidate Participation Policy

Candidate forums for primary, special and general elections are part of League of Women Voters Minnesota's 97-year tradition of helping voters obtain information about candidates' stands on issues. As LWV Minnesota works to "Grow the Vote, Protect the Vote, Empower the Vote," the Empty Chair policy plays a vital role in our efforts to protect the vote and empower voters. Therefore, LWV Minnesota's 2016 Empty Chair Policy for all state and local League candidate forums is:

League of Women Voters Minnesota is a nonpartisan, political nonprofit organization that strives to protect citizens' voting rights and deliver unbiased education to voters. Together with our cosponsors and partners, LWV Minnesota and our local Leagues conduct candidate forums (including debates), meet-and-greet gatherings, video recordings, town hall meetings and other candidate events. This policy is adopted by League of Women Voters Minnesota in response to voters' concerns about LWV not having events or being forced to cancel events, sometimes moments before they are scheduled to begin.

This policy includes when one candidate in a two-candidate race is unable or unwilling to participate. This policy is based on an updated understanding of IRS rules regarding 501(c)3 organization's activities and a careful review of LWV's mission, values and traditions. It reflects the changing climate of our political discourse and campaigns and the growing demand from voters for direct access to candidates and substantive discussion of issues.

Therefore:

1. LWV Minnesota and our local Leagues will invite candidates registered with the Secretary of State for the office in question to participate in our events and as specified in the LWV Minnesota Candidate Selection Criteria 2016 policy approved January 5, 2016. All candidates will be invited simultaneously and in the same manner which may include email. If an email address is not available from either the candidate or the Secretary of State, regular mail may be used for that candidate. Invitations will include this policy.

2. If an invited candidate is unable or decides not to appear at a scheduled event, the event will still be held. This is the case even if only one candidate appears. Unopposed candidates may appear alone.
3. No substitutes or stand-ins for the candidates will be allowed.
4. The moderator will announce that all candidates were invited to participate. In announcing that a candidate is not participating, the moderator will present a brief statement that a candidate either did not respond or declined to participate without any editorial comment.
5. The candidate or candidates who attend will have an opportunity to make opening and closing statements and express their positions on issues and in response to questions submitted by the audience. In an extraordinary circumstance and at the discretion of the local League, a candidate may submit a written statement to be read by the moderator equal in length to the opening statement of the candidate or candidates present.
6. All media outlets that typically cover LWV events will be notified of this policy in the press releases, media interviews, social media and other communications prior to the events.
7. LWV events will be conducted in accordance with other event rules as provided to candidates with their invitations.

For additional background information on the Empty Chair policy, please refer to the Empty Chair Policy Backgrounder of March 23, 2016.

— Approved March 22, 2016