

**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, [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.

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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 18 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.

**SUMMARY OF PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS 2012 – 2014
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE UNITED STATES**

Source: *Impact on Issues*; www.lwv.org/files/Impact-on-Issues-2012-2014.pdf; pp. 2-4

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

Promote an open government system that is representative, accountable and responsive.

Voting Rights

*** Citizen's Right to Vote.**

Protect the right of all citizens to vote; encourage all citizens to vote.

*** D.C. Self-Government and Full Voting Representation.**

Secure for the citizens of the District of Columbia the rights of self-government and full voting representation in both houses of Congress.

Election Process

*** Apportionment.**

Support apportionment of congressional districts and elected legislative bodies at all levels of government based substantially on population.

*** Campaign Finance.**

Improve methods of financing political campaigns in order to ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and promote citizen participation in the political process.

*** Selection of the President**

Promote the election of the President and Vice-President by direct-popular-vote and work to abolish the Electoral College. Support uniform national voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections. Support efforts to provide voters with sufficient information about candidates.

Citizen Rights

*** Citizen's Right to Know/Citizen Participation.**

Protect the citizen's right to know and facilitate citizen participation in government decision-making.

*** Individual Liberties.**

Oppose major threats to basic constitutional rights.

*** Public Policy on Reproductive Choices.**

Protect the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

Congress and the Presidency

*** Congress.**

Support responsive legislative processes characterized by accountability, representation, decision-making capability and effective performance.

*** The Presidency.**

Promote a dynamic balance of power between the executive and legislative branches within the framework set by the Constitution.

*** Privatization.**

Ensure transparency, accountability, positive community impact and preservation of the common good when considering the transfer of governmental services, assets and/or functions to the private sector.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Promote peace in an interdependent world by working cooperatively with other nations and strengthening international organizations.

United Nations

Support a strong, effective United Nations to promote international peace and security and to address the social, economic and humanitarian needs of all people.

Trade

Support U.S. trade policies that reduce trade barriers, expand international trade and advance the achievement of humanitarian, environmental and social goals.

U.S. Relations with Developing Countries

Promote U.S. policies that meet long-term social and economic needs of developing countries.

Arms Control

Reduce the risk of war through support of arms control measures.

Military Policy and Defense Spending

Work to limit reliance on military force. Examine defense spending in the context of total national needs.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest.

Natural Resources

Promote the management of natural resources as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems.

Resource Management

Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government.

Environmental Protection and Pollution Control

Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment.

*** Air Quality**

Promote measures to reduce pollution from mobile and stationary sources.

*** Energy**

Support environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize energy conservation and encourage the use of renewable resources.

*** Land Use**

Promote policies that manage land as a finite resource and that incorporate principles of stewardship.

*** Water Resources**

Support measures to reduce pollution in order to protect surface water, groundwater and drinking water.

*** Waste Management**

Promote policies to reduce the generation of, and promote the reuse and recycling of solid and hazardous wastes.

*** Nuclear Management**

Promote the maximum protection of public health and safety and the environment.

Public Participation

Promote public understanding and participation in decision making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources.

AGRICULTURE POLICY

Promote adequate supplies of food and fiber at reasonable prices to consumers and support economically viable farms, environmentally sound farm practices and increased reliance on the free market. (see 2014 Update – page 9)

SOCIAL POLICY

Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans.

Equality of Opportunity

*** Equal Rights:**

Support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and efforts to bring laws into compliance with the goals of the ERA.

*** Education Employment and Housing:**

Support equal access to education, employment and housing.

*** Federal Role in Public Education:**

Support federal policies that provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-K through grade 12.

Fiscal Policy

*** Tax Policy:**

Support adequate and flexible funding of federal government programs through an equitable tax system that is progressive overall and that relies primarily on a broad-based income tax.

*** Federal Deficit:**

Promote responsible deficit policies.

*** Funding of Entitlements:**

Support a federal role in providing mandatory, universal, old-age, survivors, disability and health insurance.

Health Care

Promote a health care system for the United States that provides access to a basic level of quality care for all U.S. residents and controls health care costs.

Immigration

Promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises; and provide for student visas. Ensure fair treatment under the law for all persons. In transition to a reformed system, support provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.

Meeting Basic Human Needs

Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

*** Income Assistance:**

Support income assistance programs, based on need, that provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing and shelter.

*** Support Services:**

Provide essential support services.

*** Housing Supply:**

Support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.

Child Care

Support programs and policies to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it.

Early Intervention for Children at Risk

Support policies and programs that promote the well-being, development and safety of all children.

Violence Prevention

Support violence prevention programs in communities.

Gun control

Protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic weapons. Support regulation of firearms for consumer safety.

Urban Policy

Promote the economic health of cities and improve the quality of urban life.

Death Penalty

The LWVUS supports the abolition of the death penalty.

Sentencing Policy

The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime. The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.

Whatever the issue, the League believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibilities, adequate financing, coordination among levels of government, effective enforcement and well defined channels for citizen input and review.

2014 UPDATES

LWVUS POSITION ON FEDERAL AGRICULTURE POLICIES

Statement of Position on Federal Agriculture Policies

As Announced by the National Board May 2014

<http://www.lwv.org/content/lwvus-position-federal-agriculture-policies>

The League believes that government should provide financial support for agriculture that includes disaster assistance, crop insurance, need-based loans and incentives to adopt best management practices. Support should be extended to specialty crops, such as fruits, vegetables and nuts, to new production methods, such as organic, hydroponics, and urban practices, and to farms that supply local and regional markets.

Subsidize crop yield insurance should be linked to implementation of best management practices with the subsidy denied for marginal or environmentally sensitive land. The premium subsidy for crop insurance should be available for a wide range of crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and specialty crops. Government should limit the amount of the premium subsidy received by larger farms.

The League supports policies that increase competition in agricultural markets. Antitrust laws should be enforced to ensure competitive agricultural markets. Alternative marketing systems such as regional hub markets, farmers' markets and farmer cooperatives should be promoted.

Clean air and water regulations should apply to all animal and aquaculture production and processing facilities, and not just to very large confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Such regulations should be designed in a manner that takes into account environmentally sound technologies and the scale of the operation being regulated. Small size operations should not be granted automatic exemption from regulation.

The League believes that government regulatory agencies dealing with animals and aquaculture production should have adequate authority and funding to 1) enforce regulations and 2) gather information that supports monitoring the impacts of all animal feeding and aquaculture operations on human and animal health and the environment.

Government should fund basic research related to agriculture. Government funded research should also address the impact of new technologies on human health and the environment prior to widespread adoption of products developed with such technologies. Assessment of products developed with new technologies should be conducted as transparently as possible, while respecting intellectual property rights. Research should be funded to support the continuation of diversified and sustainable agricultural systems, such as seed banking and promoting and preserving genetic diversity.

To provide adequate safety of our food supply, government should:

- Clarify and enforce pre-market testing requirements for foods and food additives developed using any new chemical technology, such as genetic engineering or nanotechnology;*

- *Require developers to monitor all such new food products developed after releasing to the market;*
- *Require developers of such new food products to provide data and other materials to independent third parties for pre- and post-marketing safety assessments;*
- *Fund independent third party risk assessment examining how long-term and multiple exposures to such new foods affect human health and the environment;*
- *Withdraw marketing approval and require recall if such products are shown to be unsafe;*
- *Require post-market monitoring of human health and environmental impacts for pharmaceutical applications used in animal and aquaculture production;*
- *Limit use of antibiotics in animal production to the treatment of disease;*
- *Promote crop management practices that decrease dependency on added chemicals; and*
- *Fund, employ and train sufficient personnel for assessment and compliance functions of regulatory agencies.*

The League supports government developing and requiring more informative and standardized definitions on product labeling. Food labeling and advertising should display only approved health and safety claims and an education about labeling of foods developed using any new technology.

LWVUS POSITION ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*The following position was adopted by delegates at the 2014 LWVUS Convention
<http://www.lwv.org/content/lwvus-position-human-trafficking>*

The League of Women Voters opposes all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking. We consider human trafficking to be a form of modern day slavery and believe that every measure should be taken and every effort should be made through legislation and changes in public policy to prevent human trafficking. Prosecution and penalization of traffickers and abusers should be established, and existing laws should be strictly enforced. Extensive essential services for victims should be applied where needed. Education and awareness programs on human trafficking should be established in our communities and in our schools.

**SUMMARY OF PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS
LWVNYS 2011-2013**

Source: *Impact on Issues – Updated 2013*
lwwny.org/advocacy/impact/issues/2013/Complete_2013.pdf; pp. 6-7

ELECTION LAW

UNDER LWVUS POSITIONS

Support of measures to protect, extend and encourage the use of the franchise; including paperless and Election Day registration, no-excuse absentee and in-person early voting. Restore integrity to the election process – specifically support for uniformity in election laws and procedures in their implementation and enforcement; promote measures that ensure the integrity of all ballots; support ballot access and fair campaign practices.

Support comprehensive campaign finance reform, including public financing of campaigns.

Opposition to term limits for members of the NYS Legislature.

Opposition to term limits for NYS statewide elected officials.

GOVERNMENT

UNDER LWVUS POSITIONS

Support of citizen rights, including reproductive rights.

Support of effective regulations of lobbying and ethics.

Support of standards to ensure equitable representation in the State legislature and Congress.

Support of improved measures to provide representation for legislative districts in case of a vacancy.

Support of responsive and responsible legislative processes which increase the role of the individual member and the committee system.

Support of procedural reforms in the constitutional convention process to promote openness and nonpartisanship.

Support of the consolidation of government/shared services when it promotes effective and efficient operation of government.

HEALTH CARE

Support of measures to assure a basic level of quality physical and mental health care, including regulatory incentives to encourage development of cost-effective alternative methods of delivery; funding for health promotion and disease prevention programs; provisions for effective citizen participation in health policy decisions.

Support of measures that enable individuals to assume responsibility for their own health and to participate in decisions, including extraordinary life-extending procedures.

Support for uniform eligibility and coverage of basic health care costs through public financing with single payer concept as an acceptable approach to implementing League positions on equitable access and cost containment.

JUDICIAL

Support of a unified state court system with improved provisions for judicial selection.

Support of statewide guidelines for law enforcement at all levels to prevent racial and economic profiling.

Support of measures to improve pretrial procedures in the criminal courts.

Support of measures to promote a fair and efficient jury system.

Support the rights of indigent defendants to representation at public expense.

Support of alternatives to incarceration.

Opposition to the death penalty, with life without parole as the primary alternative.

NATURAL RESOURCES

UNDER LWVUS POSITIONS

Support for protection and management of New York's natural resources in the public interest, including energy conservation and energy options from renewable sources.

Support for measures to achieve watershed protection including limiting pesticide use and applying Best Management Practices.

Support for a state-established, intergovernmental system for land resource management.

Support for a proactive role for New York State in regional land use planning, containing urban sprawl and protecting sensitive areas.

Support of reconditioning of the New York State Erie/Barge Canal System and its development for recreational uses.

Support for preserving and enhancing the environmental integrity and quality of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Ecosystem.

SOCIAL POLICY

UNDER LWVUS POSITIONS

Support for equality of opportunity, meeting basic human needs, childcare, energy-efficient and environmentally sound public transit, and gun control.

Support measures to meet the needs for affordable and accessible housing through use of state funds and incentives to localities.

STATE FINANCES

Support reforms for greater equity in education financing for both pupils and taxpayers.

Support raising funds to provide New York's children with a sound basic education through increases in the New York State personal income tax, implemented in a progressive fashion.

Support for the replacement of the existing local residential property tax relief programs, in which relief goes to all, with programs based on need with annual cost of living adjustment.

(Summary of Public Policy Positions LWVNYS 2011-2013 – continued)

Oppose in principle the use of public funds to support non-public schools (K-12).

Oppose any increase in the maximum number of charter schools without improvements to the Charter School Act.

Support the funding of public higher education and the existing formula for financing the community system, 1/3 tuition, 1/3 state aid, and 1/3 county support.

Support a uniform equitable assessment and property tax system.

Support of measures to provide for openness and accountability in the operation of the New York State public authority system.

Support of a timely and responsive state budget.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Support of measures that hold marriage to be an economic partnership with a presumption of equality between the spouses.

Opposition to measures that contain a presumption of joint custody of the children.

Support for equity in employment laws and practices and equal pay for jobs of comparable worth.

Support of measures to reduce the incidence and effects of domestic violence.

GLOSSARY OF SELECTED LEAGUE TERMS

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

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