

Results from the LWVVC Money in Politics Consensus Meeting of January 9, 2016.

This meeting followed an intensive study by a committee led by Voter Service Chair Carla Christianson and several meetings to inform LWVVC members of the study. The consensus is neither a simple majority nor unanimity; instead, it is an overall sense of the group from answers to questions on which members can find common ground and agreement. These results from LWVVC were compiled by Carla Christianson and have been forwarded to LWV.

Part I - DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND INTERESTS WITH RESPECT TO FINANCING POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

1. What should be the goals and purposes of campaign finance regulation?

- a) **Seek political equality for all citizens.**
Agree
- b) **Protect representative democracy from being distorted by big spending in election campaigns.**
Agree
- c) **Enable candidates to compete equitably for public office.**
Agree
- d) **Ensure that candidates have sufficient funds to communicate their messages to the public.**
No consensus
- e) **Ensure that economic and corporate interests are part of election dialogue.**
No consensus
- f) **Provide voters sufficient information about candidates and campaign issues to make informed choices.**
Agree
- g) **Ensure the public's right to know who is using money to influence elections.**
Agree
- h) **Combat corruption and undue influence in government.**
Agree

2. Evaluate whether the following activities are types of political corruption:

- a) **A candidate or officeholder agrees to vote or work in favor of a donor's interests in exchange for a campaign contribution.**
Agree
- b) **An officeholder or her/his staff gives greater access to donors.**
No consensus
- c) **An officeholder votes or works to support policies that reflect the preferences of individuals or organizations in order to attract contributions from them.**
No consensus

d) An office holder seeks political contributions implying that there will be retribution unless a donation is given.

Agree

e) The results of the political process consistently favor the interests of significant campaign contributors.

No consensus

PART II - FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTIONS FOR SPEAKERS AND ACTIVITIES IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

This set of questions is designed to determine the extent to which the First Amendment protections of free speech and freedom of the press should apply to different speakers or activities in the regulation of campaign finance. Free speech and free press provide essentially the same protections to speakers, writers, publishers and advertising, whether or not they are part of the institutional press, and largely regardless of the medium. Essentially, these protections extend to any conduct that is expressive. Many of the options below would be found unconstitutional by the current Supreme Court, but we are seeking your League's views, not those of the Court. These are broad, overarching questions about spending to influence an election, including independent spending, contributions to candidates, broadcast news and other communication expenditures.

1. Many different individuals and organizations use a variety of methods to communicate their views to voters in candidate elections. Should spending to influence an election by any of the following be limited?

a) Individual citizens, including wealthy individuals like George Soros and the Koch Brothers.

Some spending limits

b) Political Action Committees, sponsored by an organization, such as the League of Conservation Voters, Chevron, the American Bankers Association, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), whose campaign spending comes from contributions by individuals associated with the sponsoring organization, such as employees, stockholders, members and volunteers.

Some spending limits

c) For-profit organizations, like Exxon, Ben and Jerry's, General Motors, and Starbucks, from their corporate treasury funds.

Some spending limits

d) Trade associations, like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Wind Energy Association, and the American Petroleum Institute, from the association's general treasury funds.

Some spending limits

e) Labor unions, like the United Autoworkers and Service Employees International, from the union's general treasury funds.

Some spending limits

f) **Non-profit organizations, like the Sierra Club, Wisconsin Right to Life, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, American Crossroads, and Priorities USA, from the organization's general treasury funds.**

Some spending limits

g) **Non-partisan voter registration and GOTV (get out the vote) organizations and activities, like the LWV and Nonprofit Vote.**

Some spending limits

h) **Political parties, like the Republicans, Libertarians, and Democrats.**

Some spending limits

i) **Candidates for public office spending money the candidate has raised from contributors.**

No consensus

j) **Candidates for public office spending their own money.**

Some spending limits

2. **The press plays a major role in candidate elections through editorial endorsements, news coverage, and other communications directly to the public that are often important to the outcome. Should such spending to influence an election by any of the following be limited?**

a) **Newspapers, like the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.**

No consensus

b) **Television and other electronic media, like Fox News, CNN, MSNBC and CBS.**

No consensus

c) **Internet communications, like Huffington Post, Breitbart, Daily Kos, and individual bloggers.**

No consensus

Optional Comments

The question was too broad to answer.

Part III – METHODS FOR REGULATING CAMPAIGN FINANCE TO PROTECT THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

1. **In order to achieve the goals for campaign finance regulation, should the League support:**

a) **Abolishing SuperPACs and spending coordinated or directed by candidates, other than a candidate's own single campaign committee.**

Agree

b) **Restrictions on direct donations and bundling by lobbyists? (Restrictions may include monetary limits as well as other regulations.)**

Agree

c) Public funding for candidates? Should the League support:

(You may respond to more than one item in Question 1 c.)

i. Voluntary public financing of elections where candidates who choose to participate must also abide by reasonable spending limits?

No consensus

ii. Mandatory public financing of elections where candidates must participate and abide by reasonable spending limits?

No consensus

iii. Public financing without spending limits on candidates?

Disagree

2. How should campaign finance regulations be administered and enforced?

(You may choose more than one response for Question 2. LWVVC chose b and c)

b. By an odd-numbered commission with at least one independent or nonpartisan commissioner to ensure decisions can be made in case of partisan deadlock?

c. By structural and budget changes to the FEC (e.g., commission appointments, staffing, security, budget, decision making process) that would allow the agency to function effectively and meet its legislative and regulatory mandates.

Comment Section:

1. We would like to see more balance in Congress between parties.
2. Our group had questions about the terms and language of consensus statements. These questions resulted in no consensus several times.
3. The group is very concerned about the role of money big money and power in setting public policy. However we are also very concerned about setting limits, enforcing regulations, full disclosure and transparency. Democracy benefits from a full and open flow of competing ideas. That is the essence of democracy and LWV must continue to battle to demand it.