

Money in Politics Introduction on 11/9/15 (Part I)

Estelle Gellman, Chair of the Government Committee introduced our presentation

Good Evening. Our topic tonight is Money in Politics. As you know, although the League is non-partisan, we are a political organization and do take positions on issues - and we do have a position on campaign finance. This position, which was first adopted in 1974 and revised in 1982, reads as follows:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the methods of financing political campaigns should ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidate to compete more equitably for public office and allow maximum citizen participation in the political process. *This position is applicable to all federal campaigns for public office - presidential and congressional, primaries as well as general elections. It may also be applied to state and local elections.*

Congruent with position, the League has fought for comprehensive campaign finance reform to address abuses in the current system by, for example, supporting bills that curbed special-interest contributions and provided public financing for candidates who accept voluntary spending limits. The League has also used litigation strategies by filing amicus briefs, for example, in support of the minority views on the Citizens United case. Unfortunately, the Citizens United case has overturned significant aspects of what has been achieved over the years and, in light of the changes that have occurred since the League adopted its position, the League is now reviewing its position on campaign finance. The objective is to enhance our understanding of the new schemes and structures being used to influence elections and to assess possible means of countering them.

In looking to solutions, however, we have to understand the current situation, which is what we hope to accomplish this evening. Joan Hughes will review the categories of money and the different types of donors, Julia Kayser will describe the dollar amounts involved, Carol Mellor will clarify the First Amendment issues involved, Judy Samuelson review the legislation and court decisions affecting campaign finance in the past, Naomi Epstein will explain the Citizens United decision and Cathy Peacock will examine where we can go from here.