

**WOMEN'S LEAGUE
FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM**



**THE 2008 ELECTIONS
Activity Guide for Sisterhoods**

A reminder for the disenfranchised and cynical:

In 2000, George Bush won the state of Florida by just over 500 votes. Al Gore won the popular vote by a margin of less than one percent.

School budgets—impacting local budgets by millions of dollars—are often approved or voted down by less than 5 votes.

In 1994, two candidates tied for a seat in the Wyoming House of Representatives with 1941 votes each. A recount produced the same results. The winner was declared when a ping-pong ball bearing his name was pulled from the then-governor's cowboy hat.

Every vote counts!

One of our most important rights and responsibilities we have as American citizens is the right to vote. Jewish participation in any political process is a relatively modern phenomenon, making this process even more special. Universal suffrage should be a cherished right of citizenship and members of Women's League sisterhoods can participate in the process in many ways.

As members of a 501c3 non-profit organization, election-related activities by Women's League for Conservative Judaism, a sisterhood or synagogue are strictly circumscribed by the Internal Revenue Service. Since many of the members of our community are educated, politically active and networked to constituency groups, they are often sought out by politicians and political parties. As citizens of the United States and of your individual state, we encourage you to engage in the process; as members of Women's League, we remind you that your Women's League affiliation must be set aside during any partisan political activity.

It is a violation of IRS tax law for non-profit organizations to participate in partisan politics and electoral activity. Electoral activity, described as activity on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office, is strictly prohibited. This includes the sharing or selling contact lists, email listserv, direct contributions, in-kind contributions including the use of organization telephones and/or office equipment. Organizations may not endorse or oppose a candidate, including accepting invitations to partisan events.

That being said, public policy and election year education can lend themselves to dynamic sisterhood activities that might attract new members!

Legislative activity is permitted within limitations. Organizations may explore issues and seek to educate their constituencies regarding topical issues that are being discussed in an election year. Your goal is to help your membership make informed

decisions, which requires balanced and detailed information. Events can be held to educate sisterhood members. **However, a sisterhood must be careful to provide speakers and information representing a variety of perspectives on the issue.**

The Issues Program

Issue programs should be organized around several issues (related or not) to avoid the appearance of endorsing a specific candidate.

Provide some Jewish context for the discussion. Use a speaker who can tie the issue to a Jewish concern or text without endorsing a policy position. Explore why a particular issue is important to the Jewish community as a whole.

Invite speakers representing all sides of an issue.

Speakers may be community leaders, college professors, non-profit professionals, or others with expertise.

Use moderators who are known not to have partisan positions. If you have none within your membership, the League of Women Voters (www.lwv.org) is usually happy to help.

Meet the Candidates

(Guidelines provided by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs)

If a forum is provided to any candidate for public office, all other legally qualified individuals who have declared their actual or prospective candidacy for that same office must also be given a forum, unless a recognized, credible and independent poll has demonstrated that the candidate has less than 15 percent share of the popular support.

Questions for candidates must be prepared and presented by an independent nonpartisan individual or panel.

The purpose of the activity must clearly be educational and not biased for the support or suppression of information or candidates.

Topics must cover a broad range of issues of interest to the public. You may invite a qualified speaker to make introductory remarks that “frame” current issues in a Jewish context.

Each candidate must be given an equal opportunity to present his or her views on the issues, either in the same forum or a forum that is situated and publicized in a substantially similar fashion.

The moderator may not comment on the questions or otherwise make comments that imply approval or disapproval of any candidate.

A candidate for elected office may be invited to speak in a capacity other than as a candidate based on that individual’s expertise in the topic. In such cases:

The speaker must speak only in the capacity of his or her expertise, not as a candidate.

No mention can be made of the candidacy by anyone involved in the program.

No campaigning, including the distribution of campaign materials, may occur at the event by the speaker or those traveling attending with, or in coordination with, him/her.

The moderator and the invited speaker should be notified in writing of the above.

Publicity and other communications must clearly indicate the capacity in which the speaker is acting and may not mention the individual’s candidacy.

Letters of invitation and other communications regarding the invited speaker’s participation should not be done with the invited speaker’s campaign office or those whose primary affiliation to the speaker is campaign related.

The organization may not share staff, fundraising mechanisms, etc. with the candidate or campaign. Meeting space and mailing lists can only be offered for their fair market value and notice should be given to all candidates of the availability and related policies for such rentals. (Women’s League policy is that membership lists not be sold or shared.)

Organizations that routinely speak out (e.g. issuing press releases) when individuals make comments on matters of concern for the Jewish community (e.g. Israel, anti-Semitism, etc.) should exercise great caution when doing so with regard to an individual who is a candidate for public office, and should generally refrain from doing so. The motivation for such comments should be entirely independent of the candidacy and should make no mention of it. Those organizations that do not routinely speak out on such matters may not do so when a campaign is in progress.

Voter Registration Drive

Voter registration drives can be exceptionally engaging programs for sisterhood. Younger women and older teens/ USY members are often glad to volunteer for such an action oriented program, especially this election year, with high voter interest and engagement by campus voters. Encouraging voting is always worthwhile, but this year you will be encouraging participation in an election that has already attracted a record number of primary voters.

Plan a drive within the synagogue or local area to help people register to vote. The target population is non-registered adults and pre-college teens (18 years and older as of Election Day). A voter registration drive can be organized in local public places, shopping centers, or local town festivals. **Check local ordinances regarding cut off dates, taking tables at public events, required identification, etc.**

Each state has rules and regulations regarding voter registration. One of the easiest ways to make sure you are in compliance is to check with your local League of Women Voters, www.lwv.org.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, was organized in 1920 as a means to improve our system of government and impact public policies through education and advocacy. The League is a grassroots organization, working at the national, state and local levels. There are Leagues in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Hong Kong, in addition to the hundreds of local Leagues nationwide.

You can also organize an electronic voter registration drive by using the League of Women Voters on-line voter registration information. The website for the LWV on-line voter registration tool is: <https://electionimpact3.votenet.com/lwv/voterreg2/index.cfm>

In certain states you may be able to provide absentee ballots or information about where they can be obtained. Again, check with your local municipality or the League of Women Voters. If your sisterhood has contact information for college students, let them know about on-line resources for voter registration and absentee ballots.

For in-house drives, choose a time with high attendance so that you reach as many people as possible, such as religious school drop-off/pick up, high-holiday ticket pick-up times, Selihot services, etc.

Last, but not least, the Women's League Public Affairs Chair would love to hear from sisterhoods that have engaged in this process. Please tell Women's League when your sisterhood organizes a voter registration drive, by calling at 212.870.1260, ext.7157.

A voter registration drive is only as successful as the number of people you reach. You must publicize the activity, ask your rabbi to talk about it from the bimah, create sign-up opportunities at busy times in public and accessible places, and advertise in the synagogue bulletin or through flyers in the community.

Your sisterhood's name should be on all material as the

sponsoring organization. Once you undertake organizing a drive, or participating in an existing one (check with your local municipality, they can give you information on on-going drives), report it in your synagogue and sisterhood bulletins and on the web!

Get out the Vote Drives

Election Day "Get out the Vote" drives need not be only a partisan activity. Your sisterhood can volunteer, through a local senior center or JCC senior program, to transport non-driving/housebound seniors to polling places. Consider this a non-partisan act of hesed.

Less Traditional Ways to Get Out the Vote

Some states allow for **early in-person voting**. Check local ordinances for regulations. If you live in states allowing for early in-person voting, advertise this incentive as a get out the vote initiative.

Post card/email/website/blog reminders. Your sisterhood, independently, or in concert with your synagogue leadership, can send out reminder postcards and electronic communications to congregants about Election Day. Again, you must take care not to appear to endorse any particular candidates (you can list the offices for which individuals are running) or issues (you can list bond issues in non-partisan language). Include polling locations and hours of operation.

Voting rights are taken seriously by the government. In many states employers are required to give an employee time to go vote.

Talking Points

Why our sisterhoods should be concerned
about voter registration and voting

*Use these talking points for your sisterhood and synagogue bulletins
or your sisterhood website. These talking points are in no specific
order; you can pick and choose the points you'd like to highlight.*

Although Jews comprise a small minority of voters our
traditionally high voter turn-out has made the difference
in many elections.

As citizens of representative democracies, Jews should
participate and enable others to participate to the extent
that we can in the process.

As a community with immigrant roots, we need to
remember and cherish the right to vote;

The perception of "Jewish influence" stems from our
high voter turn-out. It is imperative that we, as a commu-
nity, continue to make voter turn- out a priority and a
cultural norm.

State by State Voter Registration Information

*This section will provide you with contact information for your
state's Board of Elections. Use this information to determine your
state's voter registration requirements.*

State Boards of Election

State	Phone	Website
Alabama	334.242.7210	www.sos.state.al.us/election/index.cfm
Alaska	907.465.4611	www.ltgov.state.ak.us/elections/
Arizona	602.542.8683	www.azsos.gov/election/
Arkansas	501.682.1010	www.sosweb.state.ar.us/elections.html
California	916.657.2166	www.ss.ca.gov/elections/
Colorado	303.894.2200, x 6307	www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections
Connecticut	860.509.6100	www.sots.state.ct.us/ElectionsDivision/ Electionindex.html
Delaware	302.739.4277	www.state.de.us/election
District of Columbia	202.727.2525	www.dcboee.org
Florida	850.245.6200	www.election.dos.state.fl.us
Georgia	404.656.2871	www.sos.state.ga.us/elections
Hawaii	808.453.8683	hawaii.gov/elections
Idaho	208.334.2300	www.idsos.state.id.us/elect/ eleindex.htm
Illinois	217.782.4141	www.elections.state.il.us
Indiana	317.232.3939	www.in.gov/sos/elections/
Iowa	515.281.0145	www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/
Kansas	785.296.4561	www.kssos.org/elections/elections.html
Kentucky	502.573.7100	www.kysos.com/INDEX/main/ elecdiv.asp
Louisiana	225.922.0900	www.sos.louisiana.gov/Home/Elections/ tabid/68/Default.aspx
Maine	207.624.7650	www.state.me.us/sos/cec/elec/elec.htm
Maryland	410.269.2840	www.elections.state.md.us
Massachusetts	617.727.2828	www.state.ma.us/sec/ele
Michigan	517.373.2540	www.michigan.gov/sos
Minnesota	651.296.9073	www.sos.state.mn.us/election
Mississippi	601.576.2550	www.sos.state.ms.us/elections/ elections.asp

Missouri	573.751.2301	www.sos.mo.gov/contact.asp
Montana	406.444.2034	sos.mt.gov/ELB/File_for_Office.asp
Nebraska	402.471.2555	www.sos.ne.gov/elec/
Nevada	775.684.5705	sos.state.nv.us/elections/nvelection/
New Hampshire	603.271.3242	www.state.nh.us/sos/electionsnew.htm
New Jersey	609.292.3760	www.njelections.org/
New Mexico	505.827.3600	www.sos.state.nm.us/elect08.htm
New York	518.474.6220	www.vote.nyc.ny.us/
North Carolina	919.733.7173	www.sboe.state.nc.us
North Dakota	701.328.4146	www.nd.gov/sos/
Ohio	614.466.2585	www.sos.state.oh.us/SOS/elections.aspx
Oklahoma	405.521.2391	www.state.ok.us/~elections
Oregon	503.986.1518	www.sos.state.or.us/elections/elechp.htm
Pennsylvania	717.787.5280	www.dos.state.pa.us/bcel/site/
Rhode Island	401.222.2345	www.elections.state.ri.us
South Carolina	803.734.9060	www.scvotes.org/
South Dakota	605.773.3537	www.state.sd.us/sos
Tennessee	615.741.7956	state.tn.us/sos/election/
Texas	512.463.5650	www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/index.shtml
Utah	801.538.1041	elections.utah.gov/
Vermont	802.828.0175	www.vermont-elections.org
Virginia	804.786.6551	www.sbe.state.va.us
Washington	360.902.4180	www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/
West Virginia	304.558.6000	www.wvotes.com/
Wisconsin	608.266.8005	elections.state.wi.us
Wyoming	307.777.7186	sos.wy.state.wy.us/election/election.htm

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

The mission of Women's League for Conservative Judaism is to strengthen and unite synagogue women's groups, their members and individual members; support them in mutual efforts to understand and perpetuate Conservative/Masorti Judaism in the home, synagogue, and community; and reinforce their bonds with Israel and Jews worldwide.

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