

Dear Local League President and/or Action Chair,

Below is a letter to the editor which we hope you will submit to your local daily and/or weekly newspaper under your signature alone or if you prefer “co-signed” with Jara Burnett. We are hearing that session may re-convene on Nov.17<sup>th</sup> and Nov 18<sup>th</sup> so time is of the essence. Many thanks for your dedicated efforts to make citizens count for more and checkbooks count for less. The League has never shied away from the tough fights – and this is one of them!

Best regards,  
Cheryl Dunson

Each year, citizens and nonprofit organizations speak up when important decisions are made in Hartford. Too often their voices are drowned out by the *ka-ching* of politicians’ coffers raking in money from lobbyists and other large campaign contributors.

One sad example of this during the last legislative session was the expanded Bottle Bill, which would have required a 5-cent deposit on bottled water. That bill, supported by the League of Women Voters and many other groups, was never called for a House vote due to the power of bottle industry dollars. Another example is the power of oil industry lobbying groups in thwarting the effort to ban the practice of “zone pricing” of gasoline. Zone pricing means allowing higher wholesale prices to be charged to station owners based upon regional affluence. These higher prices are, of course, passed on to customers.

Each year, industries and lobbying groups invest thousands of dollars that keep our voices from being heard. It’s the “golden rule” of politics—he who has the gold make the rules. The League of Women Voters, along with other good government groups, is trying to change all that. We want to return the power to the people—to make it easier for their voices to be heard. With so many recent scandals, legislators are now being pressed to reform the system and a vote might occur before Thanksgiving.

The League of Women Voters supports bans on lobbyist contributions, elimination of state contractor contributions, and restrictions on PACs. Another critical step toward reducing the influence of big money in elections is public financing of campaigns that, we believe, will level the political playing field and encourage more candidates to run for political office. Some legislators promise to support the bans and restrictions on contributions but balk at public financing of campaigns. Why are they reluctant?

- Some say that public financing of campaigns costs too much. We say that corruption and back door deals cost taxpayers more, sometimes in insidious ways, such as higher gas prices at the pump.
- Others say that public financing will take money away from other vital programs. We say that this argument falsely assumes that taxpayer dollars are always spent wisely. We have only to look at some of Connecticut’s recent scandals to see how mistaken this argument is.
- Some say that proposed campaign spending limits are too high and that candidates will hire friends and relatives at exorbitant salaries. We advise candidates to seize this opportunity to demonstrate their fiscal responsibility; let them challenge their opponents to do the same.
- Finally, critics say that they don’t want their tax dollars supporting “fringe” candidates. The League supports some basic campaign financing requirements for a candidate to qualify for public funding. And, remember, today’s “fringe” candidate may be tomorrow’s “front runner”. That’s how democracy works.

Low voter turnouts in elections and the increasing numbers of unaffiliated voter registrations indicate that citizens see little difference between parties and are opting-out. We believe that using tax dollars to encourage more citizen participation in government is money well spent.

People participate when they think that there is a fair chance that their voices will be heard. The League of Women Voters believes in leveling the playing field of public policy and opening it up to all of us, whether we wield money or not. Public financing of campaigns is the surest way of achieving this goal.

We are calling on all legislators to demonstrate the courage and leadership to pass the reforms needed to minimize the unfair influence of money and enable candidates to run for public office regardless of personal wealth. Please do the right thing and vote for comprehensive reform, including public financing of campaigns —restore citizens’ confidence in the electoral process and in our government.

Name	(with if desired Jara N. Burnett)
President	Co-President
LWV your chapter	LWV Connecticut

