



EMPTY CHAIR FORUM POLICY

When one or more candidates for federal office is on the ballot and only one candidate chooses to attend the LWW's forum, then no candidate for that office will be permitted to appear. EMPTY CHAIR FORUMS MAY NOT BE HELD FOR FEDERAL CANDIDATES (e.g. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate.) The Federal Election Commission (FEC) requires that debates/forums include at least two candidates. An empty chair forum with only one federal candidate is considered a contribution of "something of value."

An empty chair forum may be held for state, county or local offices only under these circumstances:

- No commercial media are broadcasting the forum. Under Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations, any broadcaster or cablecaster that permits a candidate for any public office to use its facilities must provide all other legally qualified candidates for the same office with equal time. Public access channels are not required to abide by this regulation.
- No Education Fund money is being used to fund the forum production. The League must be acting as a 501c4 organization, though the League's non-partisanship policy still applies.
- Every effort has been made to arrange a forum that is suitable to the schedules of the candidates. The League should avoid any appearance of partisanship. A League is encouraged to notify the press that invitations have been sent to the candidates. The League should maintain a clear record of communication with candidates, including corresponding in writing with candidates concerning invitations to appear at forums, attempts to accommodate each candidate's schedule, confirmation of scheduled forum appearances, confirmation of the cancellation of a forum appearance, and attempts, if any, to reschedule a canceled appearance.

If a League decides to go ahead with a forum when one of the candidates does not respond or accept an invitation to the forum, or when a candidate accepts but does not appear at the forum, the League moderator should announce that the absent person(s) is a candidate for that office. The moderator should present the factual reasons (if any) given by the candidate who is not present, without any editorial comment. No substitutes will be permitted to take the place of a candidate, nor will the moderator read any statements of the absent candidate's view.

In conducting any empty chair forum, the league should maintain, to the extent practicable, the already established forum format. The League must prevent the forum from turning into a candidate appearance that has the look, feel and content of a Michigan rally for the only candidate attending the debate. The moderator and/or other panelists, therefore, should ask nonpartisan questions, the length of the candidate's response should be limited, and if possible, the moderator or other panelists should act as devil's advocate, asking probing questions and follow-up questions.