

- Spreading rumors: Watch for tricky statements such as, “Although everyone says my opponent is a crook, I have no personal knowledge of any wrongdoing.” These unfair hints can sway an election long before a fair campaign investigation can stop them.
- Loaded Statements: “I oppose wasteful spending” doesn’t say much - and it makes it seem like the candidate’s opponent is for it. A candidate should say which spending should be cut and which spending is necessary.
- Catchwords: Beware of empty phrases such as “law and order” ... “The American Way,” that are designed to trigger a knee-jerk, emotional reaction without saying much.

Spot Phony Issues

- Passing the blame: When one candidate accuses another candidate or party of being the cause of a major problem, such as unemployment or inflation, check it out. Was it really possible for the candidate to solve the problem? Has there been time to tackle the problem?
- Promising the sky: Be realistic. Voters shouldn’t expect miracles and candidates shouldn’t promise them.
- Evading real issues: Many candidates work very hard to avoid giving direct answers to direct questions. It’s not enough, for instance, for a candidate to say, “I’ve always been concerned about the high cost of health care,” and leave it at that. Watch out for candidates who talk about benefits and never mention costs or how the nuts and bolts of a program will work.

Step 5: Examine the candidate’s campaign finances.

Where do the candidates get the money to pay for their campaigns?

- Use their own money
- Get money from a few rich people
- Get money from many people giving small amounts
- Get money from Political Action Committees? (PACs, as they are known, are groups formed to raise and distribute money to candidates and issues.)

Many types of information about money given to campaigns must be reported to the government and are watched by the press. Will people who are elected vote to support the people who gave them money? You may hear something like, “We all know Smith is backed by big money interests,” or “The union has Jones in its pocket.” Every candidate needs support from a wide range of people and groups who may not represent the candidate’s views on all the issues. Judge the candidate’s own words and deeds.

You can get information about campaign contributions:

Federal Election Commission

Toll free: 1 (800) 424-9530
www.fec.gov

State Public Disclosure Commission

(360) 753-1111
Toll free: 1 (877) 601-2828
www.pdc.wa.gov



Step 6: Where can you find the information you need?

You want to make the right decision, but sometimes it’s hard to quickly and easily find the information you want.

- Read your local newspaper.
- Listen to the news on television or radio.
- Talk to your friends about the election.
- Call the political parties.
- Check the League of Women Voters Web site: www.washingtonvoter.org

Washington Voter, provides information on voting, elections, and candidates in all counties.

Step 7: Pick a candidate

Now that you have the tools to make an informed choice - DO SOMETHING!

- Back the candidates you believe in.
- Talk to your friends and co-workers about “your” candidate.
- Don’t be afraid to ask tough questions at candidate meetings, at rallies and when a campaign worker rings your doorbell.
- Call TV and radio stations and newspapers to praise or criticize campaign spots.
- Be a letter writer. Tell candidates, newspapers and party leaders how you feel about the issues.
- Don’t tolerate unfair campaign practices.
- Call the League of Women Voters in your area to find out how to get involved and make a difference.

VOTE for the candidate of your choice.

This brochure was adapted in 2007 from LWVUS *Pick a Candidate*, LWVNY *How To Pick a Candidate* and LWVWA *How to Pick a Candidate*.

How to pick a candidate

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



Doing hands-on work to safeguard democracy

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Step 1: Decide what you are looking for in a candidate.

You want to pick a candidate that you agree with on the issues and that you feel would be a good person for the job. Both are important. Your first step in picking a candidate is to decide what you care about and what character you want in a leader.

Create a Candidate Report Card listing your priority issues and the qualities you think are most important in an elected official. Rate the candidates on how closely their views match yours and on their leadership abilities.

CANDIDATE REPORT CARD			
Candidate	X	Y	Z
Issues			
Terrorism			
Social Security & Medicare			
Health Care			
Education			
Campaign Finance			
Taxes			
Leadership qualities			
Leadership Abilities			
Experience			
Honesty & Integrity			

Step 2: Take a good look at campaign information

You get a lot of impressions and still feel that you get very little real information about the candidates and their views on the issues. You hear slogans, you recognize the names of famous candidates, and you can see the personalities of those candidates. But does that help you decide who you like for the job?

Candidates use many tools in campaigning for office, such as political ads, direct mail, web sites, and polls. Voters need tools to judge candidates on their positions and qualifications.

Here are some tools and suggestions:

- **TV and Radio Ads:** Ask yourself some questions. What did you learn about the candidate? Did you find out any details on what the candidate wants to do? Did the candidate tell you anything about qualifications? Or was the ad designed only to appeal to your emotions? Separate the glitter from the substance.
- **Direct Mail:** More and more candidates use direct mail to ask for money or votes. Computers make it easy to send a letter that looks like it's just for you. Remember that the letter is another way to try to get your vote and try to see what can be learned from it.
- **Pamphlets and Flyers:** The leaflet left under your door may contain good, interesting information or it may be full of half-truths. Read it critically. Does it accuse the opponent of something? Did you get it so close to Election Day that the opponent can't answer back?
- **Emotional Appeals:** Listen to a candidate's statements and arguments. Then decide if they are targeted for your emotions alone. Sometimes the words and pictures used are meant to get you to feel a certain way.

Step 3: Learn how others view the candidate.

Poll results are a favorite news story these days. People are asked who they support and sometimes why they support a particular candidate. Polls will tell you who is leading at a certain point in the campaign. Candidates like to know who's leading because it can increase support and contributions from people who want to be on the winning team.

Before you believe everything in a poll, ask these questions:

- Who paid for the poll? Did they give you all the answers? When parties and candidates pay for polls, they can control what results they give. They may not publish any information that may be bad for them.
- Was the poll affected by an important event? When people see a lot of news stories on an event such as a military crisis or a political scandal, their opinions may change.
- What questions were asked? Were they fair? You can easily spot really biased questions that produce a resounding Yes or No. Also look for the leading questions that push you to a certain answer or leave no room for a Yes, if... or No, but...
- Who was interviewed? How were people picked? Were people chosen at random? Did the poll include all parts of the country? If not, the results may tell you how a small group feels but nothing about the total population.
- How many people were interviewed? No matter how well a poll is done, there is always a margin of error. The smaller the number of people, the more chance that there are mistakes.
- How many "Undecideds"? Remember, once the "undecideds" make up their minds, the results could change dramatically.
- How long ago? Even the best polls are just a snapshot in time. People may change their minds in a day, a week, or a month, especially as new things happen or they learn more. Look for polls and compare the new poll with past ones, and try to spot trends.
- Be smart about how you use group ratings: Endorsements provide clues to the importance a candidate places on an issue. Some organizations representing

special interest groups (business, the environment, labor, older Americans, etc.) go through people's votes on bills and rate them on how closely they match one group's point of view. These ratings can be helpful, but they can be misleading. Never take them as the final word.

- Check the organization's reputation. Can it be trusted?
- What is the group's bias? Which issues are important to its members? Are they the same ones you care about? What one group might label as a vote for wasteful spending, another might see as a vote in support for an important project.
- What votes were included in the ratings? Sometimes, for instance, the vote that really tells you how the person thinks is on an amendment, not on the main bill. Do the group's choices and explanations help you sort it all out?

Step 4: Rate the candidates on how they campaign

You can tell a lot about a candidate by the way the campaign is run. We deserve open, honest campaigns that tell us about what the candidate wants to do. We shouldn't put up with unfair campaigns.

- Does the candidate answer questions? Is the candidate willing to debate with opponents? Does the candidate appear in person or send a "stand-in"?

Here are some ideas that help you identify an unfair campaign:

- **Name-calling:** A candidate might call an opponent "wishy-washy" or "two-faced" when he or she really is just showing that it's OK to listen to both sides and to change your mind. Don't listen to attacks on a candidate's family, ethnicity, gender, race or personal characteristics that don't have anything to do with how the candidate will do the job.