



Issues Briefing-October 10, 2009

Crafting Questions that Differentiate
Candidates

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Crafting Questions for Four Forums

I. 2006 Primary Election Forum for five candidates for the 8th Congressional seat which was open.

-LWVGGB worked with LWVWI and a local TV station to sponsor the forum in August of 2006.

- LWVGGB initiated idea to do the primary since there was wide interest in the state and nationally.

- There was agreement that the questions would be prepared ahead of time due to filming.

-Questions came from a link on TV station Website to League e-mail. A few questions came from the public this way. Through publicity, some calls came to League President.

-League members working on forum reviewed League Positions and crafted a question or two from those positions. (Campaign Finance Reform).

-Questions and format of forum were the purview of the League.

-Questions needed to be clear and pertinent for each candidate to answer.

-Questions could not be complex because each candidate had only 90 seconds to answer due to 90 minute time limit and five candidates who answered each question.

-TV staff had some good editing suggestions for the questions.

-Questions were asked by one of the TV station news anchors.

-TV station played one question and the answers from each candidate for eight nights after the forum and played the entire 90 minutes of the forum on the Sunday before the primary election.

2. 2008 General Election-Forum State Senate seat with incumbent and challenger.

3. 2009 Spring Local Election Forum for Village President of a village adjacent to Green Bay.

-Both of the above Forums used our League's usual process of having League members distribute index cards with pencils to attendees at the forums. League

members then sort the questions into topic categories. They may rewrite or edit questions or develop a question around a common theme from several other questions. Participants like to hear their own questions, but sometimes clarification is necessary.

-Each candidate had two minutes to answer each question. In both forums many questions were answered.

4. Health Care Reform Forum- October 3, 2009 with 8th District Congressman Steve Kagan

-Due to the disruptions and lack of civility in previous events related to health care reform, LWVGGB decided to try our usual forum format with questions being written on cards.

-League members sorted the cards by topic and began editing as necessary with the questions related to the topic with the most cards first. Many of the questions were well-written by the participants and obviously something that they had thought about.

-The public told us through their reservation phone calls and e-mails that they wanted to hear the answers to their questions and not listen to long drawn out answers or lectures. We took the rather bold step to time the answers to no longer than five minutes for the Congressman to answer the questions. He complied for the most part.

-Twenty-one questions were answered during the 90 minutes forum. All topics on the cards submitted by the participants were at least touched upon.

In all four of these events, the feedback from the participants was very positive. This one in particular was especially appreciated since even those attending who didn't want to see health care change, complied with our request to not applaud or make other responses to the Congressman's answers as that would take away from the time to ask more questions.

The planning of the forum took a lot of work by our League, but several members stepped up to be part of the planning group and on the day of the event, we had a great turnout of League members to do all the necessary tasks. The Congressman and his office made several comments about the organization of the event and how smoothly things went.

My perspective as President of the League is that the most important element in crafting questions is to have the right League members working with the questions that are submitted by participants. These members are familiar with the issues and edit and rewrite questions when necessary that enhances the image of the person writing the questions and of the League. There is both skill and an art involved!