

Lewis and Clark Democratic Central Committee

Endorsement Working Group - Report and Plan on Endorsements

The Endorsement Working Group consisted of eight volunteers in the central committee seeking to improve the way we talk about endorsements and to make a plan for endorsements in political races. We held three in-person meetings, which resulted in substantive dialogue and agreement on broad principles. We also referred to endorsement plans from other central committees for ideas. This report, if approved by the central committee, will serve as our endorsement policy moving forward, pending a more formal rewrite of the by-laws.

We kept in mind the cooperative and informal spirit of our committee when producing this report. When an endorsement has been made, the LCDCC should communicate that endorsement through press releases, social media, and other official announcements.

The committee recommends amendment of the bylaws to include reference and incorporation of this policy as applicable, at the discretion of the Central Committee.

Re-naming the VAN approval process

To reduce confusion, we propose no longer using the words “endorsement” or “certified” when describing approval for the VAN. Instead we will use the language “Grant approval for the VAN” or “Grant VAN access.” Allowing access to the VAN is not an endorsement of candidacy, but is a statement that the person is a known democrat. VAN approval will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. When considering approval for the VAN for a first-time user, the committee will consider the following factors: length of involvement in the Democratic party, involvement in Democratic issues, past donations to Democratic candidates, and work with non-profits whose efforts closely parallel Democratic values.
2. VAN approval will be granted by a majority vote of attendees at the monthly meeting. Alternatively, the executive board may vote on approval if there would be a hardship to the candidate that could not be addressed by the next meeting.
3. Repeat users of the VAN are automatically approved absent a substantial change in circumstances.
4. When a candidate has been approved for the VAN, the committee shall furnish the following endorsement to the candidate: “Approval for the VAN does not constitute an official endorsement from the LCDCC. A fee is required to use the VAN and the LCDCC will not provide funds to cover the VAN fee. “

Endorsement policy in partisan primaries

It is the policy of the LCDCC not to issue endorsements in partisan primaries--that is, races where one is running under a party label and seeking the party's nomination, such as the state legislature. The central committee will not officially elevate one democrat over another competing for the party nomination in the same race. That being said, an endorsement process is separate from recruiting candidates, encouraging candidates, and giving candidates candid advice. Individual committee members remain free to support partisan candidates of their preference, but the LCDCC will remain officially neutral.

Endorsement policy in non-partisan primaries

The LCDCC will be involved in the endorsement of local non-partisan races. A non-partisan race is one where the candidates don't run under a party label and follow the non-partisan election rules (non-partisan filing for the primary, with the top two vote-getters advancing to the general). Candidates must seek an endorsement in order to be considered for one. The LCDCC may choose to endorse a candidate, but is always free to take the position of "No Endorsement."

The non-partisan races generally covered under this policy are: County officials, County Commission, Mayor, City Commission, School Board, and City/County ballot questions. When discussing "candidates" as to ballot questions, we will be referring to the organizations in favor or against the ballot question.

The working group was divided on whether to include judicial races. Because a candidate must seek the LCDCC endorsement under this policy, and to have a judicial candidate seeking a partisan endorsement may violate the rules of judicial conduct, this endorsement policy will not cover judicial races. The committee is not barred from releasing statements about judicial candidates outside this process.

We propose the following endorsement procedure:

1. No discussion of endorsements will take place until the end of the filing period, which is typically in early March. When the filing period closes, the LCDCC will send the following e-mail to ALL local democratic and non-partisan candidates inviting them to speak at our monthly meeting to pitch their candidacy and ask for support. The same email will also invite candidates in non-partisan, non-judicial races to seek LCDCC endorsement if they are interested in doing so.
2. The LCDCC will discuss the races at the March and/or April meeting and look at each race where a candidate has expressed interest in an endorsement. The LCDCC will then seek volunteers to form an endorsement committee for each such race. Any LCDCC member (except a volunteer involved in the race in question) can join the endorsement committee.
3. The endorsement committee will prepare a short list of prepared questions to ask the candidates, and to make logistical arrangements for candidate interviews.
4. At the candidate interview, the committee will ask each candidate for a particular office the same prepared questions. The committee members are free to ask follow-up questions.
5. Following the interview, the committee will gather and arrive at a recommendation to present to the full committee. The usual recommendations will be to endorse one candidate or to make no endorsement in the race. Depending on the specifics of the individual race, co-endorsements may also be possible. A majority of the endorsement committee must reach a recommendation, otherwise their position is no endorsement.
6. The endorsement committee will present their recommendation to the full LCDCC. The LCDCC will debate and vote on whether to approve the endorsement committee's recommendation. If a vote to endorse a candidate prevails, the LCDCC has officially endorsed that candidate for the race. Endorsements will usually be for the general election. Endorsements in primary elections are possible if the LCDCC deems the endorsement important, and will be expedited so a decision can be made by the April meeting if possible.