

Historical Overview: LWVDC's *Candidates' Answers*

Candidates' Answers Guidelines [March 2013]

By Mary Bean

[Source: "Through the Years with *Candidates' Answers*," LWVDC *Bulletin* (February 1998, p. 3), modified by Mary Bean, July 2005, March 2013]

In the process of moving the local League office [from the East Dayton Street to the Marshall Court location], some interesting versions of *Candidates' Answers* (CA) came to light. For some of you they will call to mind your part in the production, for others, they will cause you to marvel at the dedication of our voters' service "foremothers."

We have two clippings from *The Capital Times*, in which the paper indicates a long-standing tradition of the Madison League sending questionnaires to candidates. These clippings appear to be all the responses in the Spring of 1956 and again in 1965, with pictures of candidates for the major offices.

Then there were the mimeographed copies: legal-length paper, as many as 24 pages. If memory serves us right, the maximum number one could run using heavy-duty stencil was 5,000. In the late 1960s – early 1970s, a crew of members stood guard over 3- and 4-foot stacks of reams of paper and the mimeograph for hours and hours.

When it was all the rage to do "-in" things, the League teamed up with WHA-TV for the Madison Vote-In. This seems to have been a four-year relationship in the early 1970s, coordinating TV-interviews conducted by League members and printed *Candidates' Answers* (with three-color cover). The Madison and Middleton Leagues merged in 1971 to become the LWV-Dane County and prompted the expansion of election coverage to all Dane County Board candidates.

Having gone to a professionally printed format, the League continued paying for that service but members typed the copy on rolls of shelf paper and corrected the mistakes by rubber cementing anywhere from one letter to whole paragraphs over the errors. The computer age did away with the rubber cement fumes! However, members have still proofread the copy and layout to make sure the candidates' replies were verbatim.

The cover has undergone several changes. The mimeographed copies relied on large letters for style. In the early 1970s, we had a row of stars down the left-hand side; from about 1982 to 1997 we used a member-designed, stylized flag with red stars and stripes. There are copies of CA printed in a variety of shades of blue ink to complete the patriotic bent of the red flag.

In the spring of 1982 when redistricting after the 1980 census was completed, we included the new voting district maps for each city.

LWVDC's first attempt at a Spanish-language edition was a 4-pager for the 1989 September Primary Election.

In June of 1993, LWVDC printed limited editions of CA for the Primary and Special Elections for the 79th Assembly District seat, in which three political parties were represented.

Along with voting information, we included political cartoons in 1994-1996. Several (one of which we commissioned) were by KIRK (a free-lance cartoonist in the Twin Cities area) and one by the staff cartoonist of the Sun Prairie paper. The cartoons, along with all but the most essential voting information, were dropped when the shift was made to the more expensive but greater coverage by inserting CA in the weekly *Isthmus*.

A new, improved CA hit the streets January 29, 1998 as an insert in the 61,000 copies of *Isthmus*, with a new flag (echoed on the back page), pictures of candidates, questions printed on every page, and maps outlining either

school districts/cities/towns/villages or school districts/county board districts (in the Spring), and WI Senate and Assembly districts (in the Fall, even-numbered years).

Isthmus started to staple the CA-insert in April 2005, when it achieved the capability to do this. With the 2006 elections-cycle, the flag design was changed to a podium with tri-color bunting in three loops and a microphone above. The podium and microphone change directions as the perspective and size of the image is changed to fit the amount of front-page space available.

The first joint effort with *Nuestra Comunidad en La Nación* was November 2000. Thereafter, CA appeared in Spanish translation in Madison's Spanish-language paper *La Comunidad News*, in November 2004, February 2005, Spring and Fall of 2006, Spring 2007, Spring and Fall 2008, and Spring 2009. These special editions were financed in a number of ways, including full- or partial-contributions from *The Capital Times* and two Evjue Foundation CA grants. From 2006 through 2009 LWVDC worked with Language Specialists and English-language learners of La Follette High School and others to make the translations. For example, in 2008, Language Specialists and students from West High School, UW-Madison, MATC-Madison, and Honduras participated. The League made a donation to the La Follette ESL/Bilingual program in recognition of their contribution to the civic life of the Hispanic community.

In the Spring and Fall of 2004, LWVDC started posting the primary-election edition of CA online only, instead of paying for a print-insert in *Isthmus*. Since then, the CA primary-election editions of Spring and Fall 2006, Spring and Fall 2010, Fall 2012, and Spring 2013 have all been online only.

CA has been online and in *Isthmus*, as an insert, for the Spring Elections since 2006. LWV of Wisconsin Education Fund ceased to offer a Voters' Guide for state-level candidates in the Spring Primary and Spring Election of 2011. LWVDC has since requested and received either a list of LWV-WIEF-suggested questions for the state-level candidates or permission to formulate our own questions for state-level candidates and to print their responses in CA.

For the Fall 2012 Presidential and General Election, the first question used previously for decades -- "What educational, occupational, civic, and community experience have you had that you believe qualify you for this elective office?" -- was updated to read, "Please describe your priorities for your term in office and your specific qualifications to address those issues effectively."

Statistically, LWVDC continues to have candidate response rates ranging from the upper 50%-figures through the 60%-figures, and often into the 70%-figures. In fact, for the Spring 2013 primary-election CA (available online only), LWVDC attained a 92% candidate response rate. Without delving into the political background of each election cycle, it appears safe to say that candidates welcome the opportunity to take advantage of LWVDC's CA-format and distribution system, and Dane County citizens appreciate the chance to compare candidates for a given office responding to the same set of questions.

The Walker administration's Voter ID law of 2011 necessitated significant changes in the CA's "Voting Information" section. LWVDC, in its Spring Primary 2011 CA, displayed the newly required voting law changes in its "Voting Information" section. Meanwhile, LWVWI challenged the new Voter ID Law in Dane County Circuit Court, where the law was determined to be unconstitutional. An injunction was placed against enforcing the law, which then led to further rounds of litigation. LWVDC's list of Voter ID law changes, which were temporarily suspended by the litigation, has been displayed thereafter in CA in **shaded format**. Shading was needed in the Spring Election 2011 CA, the Fall Partisan Primary 2012 CA, the General Election Fall CA, the Spring Primary 2013 CA, and the Spring Election 2013 CA. As of this update, the law case is still wending its way from the Supreme Court back through the Appeals-Court process, with a possible appeal back to the Supreme Court.
