



To: President-Elect Joe Biden and transition team
From: Virginia Kase, CEO and Dr. Deborah Turner, LWVUS President
Date: January 4, 2021
Re: Opportunities to forward voting rights and democracy in Biden Administration

Dear President-Biden and transition team —

You have our deepest congratulations on becoming the 46th President-Elect of the United States! Your victory achieved many historic milestones, and the League looks forward to working with your Administration on many of the announced goals to successfully confront the COVID-19 pandemic, attain economic recovery, confront racial justice head-on, and tackle the climate crisis. But as you know, there is much to be done and these four goals are only the tip of the iceberg.

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of the United States, a nonpartisan, nonprofit voting rights and democracy-forward organization, we have many priorities which overlap and are complementary to the Build Back Better plan. We are a grassroots group with more than 500,000 members and supporters nationwide. The League focuses on issues, education, and advocacy to achieve our mission to empower voters and defend democracy. We share this memo with you, the U.S. Congress, and members of your cabinet to express our priorities to begin the hard work together and start the conversation about how we can work together to move our democracy forward. Here are the League's priorities for consideration:

1. RESTORE THE VRA

Restoring the *Voting Rights Act* will strengthen our elections by cutting back the obstructive laws that have kept eligible voters of color from exercising their right at the ballot box. Since the Supreme Court's Shelby County decision rolled back key provisions of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, we have seen the process of voting become more challenging, especially for women and communities of color. In recent elections, voters have faced a variety of obstacles, from reduced polling locations that lead to long lines and too strict voter identification requirements, to the illegal removal of registered voters from the rolls and restrictions that limit voters' options when it comes to how they cast their ballot. As you know, the *Voting Rights Act* was created to ensure that every American has an equal right to vote. H.R.1 includes strong support for restoring the provisions to strengthen voting rights and protect all eligible Americans at the ballot box.



2. IMPLEMENT FAIR REDISTRICTING

It is time to end gerrymandering once and for all so that voters select their elected officials – not the other way around. Additionally, without passage of the *John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act*, 2021 will be the first redistricting cycle conducted without the full protections of the VRA. Across the country, in legislatures, in court, and on the ballot, the League has fought efforts of politicians from both major parties to draw unfair election maps that keep power in their own hands. Gerrymandering silences voters and residents of disputed districts, who, instead of electing officials to represent their interests, are selected by the politicians working to serve themselves. H.R.1 establishes clear rules around state redistricting processes so that maps can be drawn fairly. These provisions, combined with the passage of the *John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act*, will ensure fair and equal representation for all people across the country.

3. PROTECT DEMOCRACY BY PASSING THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

We must modernize the voter registration process through the expansion of automatic voter registration, online voter registration, and same day registration. This year alone we saw exactly how these provisions that increased voter turnout which means more Americans have their voices heard and elect politicians that better reflect that will of the voters. As election observers and partners in the national nonpartisan Election Protection coalition, the League has seen first-hand the current problems with our election system that prevent participation of eligible voters in our elections: complicated registration and deadlines that vary by state and county, wrongfully purged voters, recounting processes, and audits with an increased number of provisional ballots. H.R.1 will modernize our voter registration processes, which would go a long way in addressing these barriers.

4. ENSURE EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL

The time has come to push the Equal Rights Amendment over the finish line. The required thirty-eight states have ratified the amendment and it is time for the National Archivist to proceed with the certification. The addition of the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution would address the root cause of inequality by amending our constitution. The League is an organization that was born out of the movement to secure voting rights for women. We have continued to fight for equal rights and equal opportunities for all. Despite the significant progress that women have made towards equality over the years, women still face systematic discrimination in the form of unequal pay, workplace harassment, and domestic violence. We ask the Biden administration to direct the National Archivist to ratify the 19th Amendment.

5. IMMIGRATION

Monumental reform is needed following the Trump administration's cruel actions towards immigrants, asylum seekers, and mixed-status families. The League thanks President-elect Biden for committing to immediately rescind the Muslim and African Bans and numerous other executive orders that harm the immigrant community. It is also critical that a permanent path to citizenship is implemented and steps are taken to reduce the detention of immigrants as soon as possible. While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to harm immigrant families, many of whom



are frontline workers, it is important that vaccine distribution and economic support is accessible to all, regardless of immigration status and prioritization with those communities who are impacted most.

For over a decade, the League has supported a clean *DREAM Act*, the reunification of families, the admission of refugees and asylum seekers, and an expeditious immigration system with minimal visa backlogs. In the last four years, we have opposed the rescission of DACA, the proposed Securing America's Future Act of 2018, the prior administration's horrific separation of families at the border, and the Public Charge rule. Protecting the basic human rights of immigrants is critical to our mission and to the nation's promise of equality for all.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

We must rise to the challenge and meet the threats posed by climate change, especially the impact on the most vulnerable Americans. Your statement listing climate as one of your administration's top four priorities is heartening. Tackling this priority requires an ambitious and comprehensive reduction of domestic emissions, rejoining international environmental pacts (see priority no. 9), and critical resilience building in communities most likely to be affected by natural disasters and industrial transition.

Since the late 2000s, LWV has fervently advocated for a coordinated government response to global climate change. We have long lobbied for caps on pollution, investments in renewable energy, carbon pricing, and stronger EPA regulations on methane and other gases. More recently, the League has expanded our work to focus on climate justice: the impacts of climate change on younger generations, indigenous communities and people of color, working-class neighborhoods, and families in economic transition. We have strongly opposed the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline and joined litigation in support of the plaintiffs in *Juliana v. U.S.*, a lawsuit by young people against the Trump for the government's affirmative action that causes climate change violating the youngest generation's right to life, liberty, and failure to protect essential public interest resources.

7. ENSURE QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR ALL AMERICANS

The U.S. health care system should provide a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost to all U.S. residents. Basic care includes disease prevention, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute long-term care, mental health care, as well as health promotion and education. Health care policy goals should include the equitable distribution of services and delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology, and a reasonable total national expenditure level. The Leagues works to provide millions of Americans across the country with objective information about the health care system and its significant reforms. This includes organizing community education projects, holding public forums and debates, creating, and distributing resource materials, and engaging leading policy makers and analysts. We ask the Biden administration to protect the *Affordable Care Act* and work to strengthen the law against future attacks.



8. END GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

The League believes that the Biden Administration should work with the 117th Congress to adopt legislation that will close the gun show loophole, provide universal background checks, increase penalties for straw purchases of guns, ban assault weapons, place limits on high-capacity ammunition magazine size, fund research and reporting on gun violence in America. The nation needs and demands comprehensive gun reform, including placing limits on magazine size is a common-sense solution to shootings that risks multiple lives. This limit should include magazines and other ammunition feeding devices that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition. These devices allow shooters to fire numerous rounds in rapid succession without having to stop and reload, and they have been a central part of the mass killings in schools and public meeting places. In addition, background checks are not required for the 40 percent of gun sales that take place at gun shows, person-to-person sales, or other private transactions. A recent Quinnipiac poll found that support for background checks is almost universal with 97 percent of voters in favor of background checks on all gun purchasers. This is the highest level of support ever measured by the independent poll.

9. ENSURING PEACE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE ABROAD

The League was a founding member of the United Nations in 1945 and to this day we continue our work with the UN as official observers. By working collaboratively and focusing on issues of common priorities, The League of Women Voters will readily support the Biden Administration to advance the goals of the United States at the United Nations. Through our work on various coalitions and by interventions, The League is working to eliminate human trafficking by focusing on the demand side of the equation in an effort to bankrupt this \$150 billion illicit industry; encouraging our 500,000+ activists to “think globally and act locally” regarding implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including strong democratic institutions (#16), climate action (#13), improved healthcare (#3), women’s equality (#5), education (#4) and decent work and economic growth (#8). The Biden Administration should restore the United States’ standing at the UN by re-entering the Paris Agreement on Climate (including increasing the U.S. emission reduction ambitions and agreeing to Article 6 on carbon markets), halting the withdrawal from the World Health Organization [(WHO), which is set to be complete by July 2021], reapplying to the Human Rights Council, and resume active engagement with civil society.

We implore the Biden Administration to consider these nine priorities of the League of Women Voters of the United States. We hope that this is the first of many conversations to move our democracy forward and we welcome the Administration to reach out to Celina Stewart, Chief Counsel, Sr. Director of Advocacy and Litigation at advocacy@lwv.org at any time to coordinate and collaborate on efforts.



Congratulations again on this historic Administration and we look forward to working together to achieve our common goals in the years ahead.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Virginia Kase'.

Virginia Kase
CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deborah Ann Tuyny, MD, JD'.

Dr. Deborah Turner
Board President

