

LEAGUE OF *independent* VOTERS OF TEXAS

PO Box 651 * Bastrop, TX 78602 * IndependentLeagueTX.org * 512.213.4511

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How to Organize Texas Independents

The most pressing problems of our nation are not up for debate in this mid-term election. They are the growing national debt threatening economic stability and the calcification of a two-party monopoly that precludes the rigorous debate necessary to avert an economic crisis.

One-party rule is the most potent enemy of consensus. The Democratic strongholds in Texas municipalities are just as unhealthy as the Republican strongholds in the state legislature.

The League of Independent Voters (LIV) seeks to organize the largest portion of voters — a 46% plurality of America is independent, according to this 2018 [Gallup poll](#). This [November 2017 NBC/GenForward poll](#) of the incoming generation shows 71% of young Americans want a third party.

LIV was founded in 2013 as a non-partisan, non-profit 501c4 membership organization dedicated to forging cross-partisan alliances. LIV has focused on state issues. But this year we are eager to move into the chasm created by the major parties in the federal arena.

Most Americans have no idea, or much care, that the country has a \$21 trillion debt. No wonder. Republican and Democratic “leaders” hardly worry about it. Future deficit forecasts? If re-election isn’t dependent on them, they won’t talk about them.

Yet, as Baby Boomers retire, the lines for Social Security and Medicare just keep getting longer. And Eisenhower’s warning about a Military-Industrial Complex has proven prophetic. Our military budget was increased by \$69 billion this year. The increase is equal to the entire annual military budget of Russia. How is it that talks of a “tax cut 2.0” are already underway but serious discussion of the massive impact on projected deficits created by the tax cut last year is no where to be heard? The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is predicting TRILLION-DOLLAR deficits.

Could the “crazy aunt in the basement” (the image used by Ross Perot for the 4-trillion dollar debt in 1992) break out and go on a rampage? Who knows? But independents are the most likely voters in America to take action when someone finally sounds the alarm. Let’s just hope interest rates are not rising too much when the time comes, sending America to the emergency room.

Quick Review of LIV

LIV mission: Grow the five-million-strong group of independent Texas voters from a 42% plurality to a majority dedicated to replacing two-party rule with competitive elections.

LIV Focus: Issues are our focus. We do not endorse candidates, but we may do scorecards, forums and social media in a few key districts where we see competitive races for federal and state elections.

LIV Quick History: Some of the founders of LIV went through the grand-but-failed experiment in the 1990's Perot movement and subsequent Reform Party. We learned through this experience that independent voters are not to be harnessed and fit "into" a political party. After that, a variety of organizing experiments with successful efforts in building cross-partisan alliances led to the founding of LIV in 2013.

Helpful Background:

- See "[Divided We Stood](#)" about the 2006 Texas independent gubernatorial campaigns.
- See [Who Will Organize the Independents?](#)

Candidate Options, LIV Ideas

Below are some ideas on what kinds of activities we might do together or separately with 2018 candidates, regardless of party affiliation. We are also happy to entertain your suggestions.

1. **Candidates can endorse any of LIV's efforts and use our materials on their website.** Though LIV will not be endorsing, LIV may do a scorecard of the candidates in your race. You can shine as an independent star by adopting our concerns.

2. **Use "Uncle Sam's Checkbook" at your events to demonstrate your greater knowledge than your opponent about the federal budget and the dangers of a growing debt-crisis.** (LIV sells the Checkbook booklet wholesale for \$3, which also helps fund LIV. If you did not receive a copy via regular mail, let us know right away.)

3. **LIV may run forums in your district.** These forums are designed to be participatory and discourage detractors shilling for candidates or special interests. The forums also provide a place for candidates to meet up with independent voters. Possible topics include:

- a. **The Crazy Aunt in the Basement - the National Debt Crisis:** These are participatory workshops put on by LIV's own "resident budget nerd" Jeff Harper. Jeff is the author of Uncle Sam's Checkbook. Participants are engaged to balance the federal budget. We also suggest you meet with Jeff to discuss the federal budget and have him explain how you can use the booklet as a quick tool for education on the federal budget.
- b. **Electoral Competition and Independent Politics:** LIV is qualified to talk about how independent politics has been thwarted through unfair ballot

access laws in the most independent of states, the great state of Texas. This workshop also focuses on a variety of political reforms, such as non-partisan independent-citizen redistricting. ([See LIV political reforms here.](#))

- c. **The Central Texas Water Wars:** Leaders of the two parties are afraid to break ranks and start the conversation of how to balance conservation of water resources with development. LIV has some of the most well-informed people in Texas on this issue because LIV was born 35 miles east of Austin, right over the most targeted groundwater in Texas.

LIV Policy Priorities

Make our Independent issues yours!

National Issues

Re-building Consensus in Congress

LIV urges candidates running for US Congress to support the “[Break the Gridlock](#)” proposal of the [Problem Solvers Caucus](#) in the US House. The proposal speaks for itself.

Our only addition is the recognition that those who make the rules, rule. (Suggested read: “[Those Who Make the Rules, Rule,](#)” by Professor Omar Ali.)

→ Congressional candidates can pledge to join the Problem Solvers Caucus on your first day in Congress.

The National Debt

Our national debt poses a threat because of its capacity to undermine economic stability and in turn social cohesion. A stable economic footing is as much about domestic tranquility as it is the general welfare.

As our governing institutions decay, our national finances decline. Are we in the early stages of falling apart as a nation? Crazy? Unthinkable?

Consider for a moment how much worse our polarized political dialogue might now be if the economy had not improved much since 2008?

Now, consider the Fed’s actions to stabilize the economy back in 2008. It purchased large amounts of US Treasuries to increase the money supply in order and jump-start the economy. Since 2008, the Fed has expanded its balance sheet by seven times the amount it had accrued in its almost 100 years of previous existence. So what? What does this mean? What this means is that in the next economic recession, the Fed’s capacity to “pump up the economy” will not be as great. The risks of inflation might be prohibitive. It would also face the tremendous challenge of ridding itself of the assets it now holds, without disrupting the economy.

Finally, consider how elected officials in Washington have enacted tax cuts and fiscal stimulus, time and again, with the rationalization of growing the economy so as to reduce federal deficits. However, the national debt continues to mount. The national debt is rising both in actual dollars and as a percentage of our nation's economy. So much so, that projected debt-to-GDP ratios for the not too distant future now exceed those of the historic highs following WWII. Unlike today, in 1950 most all of our debt was held domestically, the US dominated world trade, and the dollar was as "good as gold."

→ Candidates (state and federal) can pledge support of the non-partisan effort put forward by the respected Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget [to fix the debt](#).

→ CRFB has agreed to come to Texas to put on forums. Will you participate?

National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform "Simpson-Bowles"

The last major effort to rein in the national debt was made in 2010, when President Obama appointed an 18-member commission with the objective of putting the national debt on a stable and downward path. Simply put, to come up with a budget plan. The nickname of the commission stems from the two chairs, former Republican Senator Alan Simpson and former Chief of Staff for President Clinton, Erskine Bowles.

Simpson-Bowles convened in April, held hearings for several months, and then held a formal vote on whether to send the budget blueprint that evolved out of the hearings to Congress. On December 3, the budget plan only received 11 of the required 14 votes to make it out of committee. Below are the 11 yes votes and the 7 no votes.

Yes

Alan Simpson (R-WY), former Senator
Erskine Bowles (D-Chief of Staff, Clinton)
Alice Rivlin (D-former CBO and/or OMB Director)
Kent Conrad (D-ND) Senate Budget Chair
Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) House Budget Chair
Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL)
Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK)
Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH)
Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID)
David Cote (R) Honeywell International
Ann Fudge (I) Young & Rubicam Brands

No

Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT)
House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI)
Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI)
Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-TX)
Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)
Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-CA)
Andrew Stern (D) Service Employees

What to do:

Until a financial crisis emerges, President Trump and Congress won't see the light. Until they feel the heat, they will do nothing much about pending trillion-dollar deficits. Ethical candidates can score "independent points" by playing the role of educator on the budget challenges we face.

→ Pledge to help LIV organize "Deficit Reduction Exercises" throughout your district. Candidates can help lead the discussion, if you wish. We do not expect you to come up

with your own budget plan - any sincere and responsible effort on that would take months. We request you help engage citizens in a “kitchen table” discussion of budget priorities. Ordinary citizens can be gently challenged to “balance the budget” as though they are members of Congress. Fresh ideas will come out of this process and everyone will learn. LIV will help you by engaging independent voters to take responsibility as well for this challenge. We will be making the same request of other candidates in your race.

State Issues

Ballot Access, Redistricting, Municipal Petition, Groundwater and Eminent Domain Reform

Major party voters, by large margins, want additional choices (2017 Poll), and only 22% of infrequent or unregistered voters surveyed think either major party offers enough choice ([April 2018 USA Today Poll](#)). We have no Texas specific polls. We invite your campaign to share polling data with us about independent and non-aligned voters in your district.

Ballot Access Reform

Independent ballot access experts have rated Texas in the top five of the most difficult states in the country for statewide independents and parties to achieve ballot access. Statewide independent candidates must gather generally 50,000 signatures in 60 or sometimes only 30 days and only from voters who did not vote in the primary.

LIV is part of a coalition of independents and minor parties in Texas backing the [Texas Voter Choice Act \(TVCA\)](#). TVCA, which establishes fair rules for independent candidates and minor parties to get on the ballot, was introduced into the Texas House in the 2017 legislative session.

TVCA features are:

- Establishes reasonable signature requirements and filing deadlines
- Authorizes voters to sign nomination petitions online
- Eliminates restrictions on voters’ right to sign nomination petitions if they vote in a major party primary
- Eliminates unneeded filing requirements for candidates
- Establishes reasonable requirements for retaining ballot access for established minor parties

Visit the website for details: [Texas Voter Choice Act](#)

→ State and Federal candidates should support the TVCA.

→ Federal candidates should also support the reintroduction of the fair ballot access legislation first introduced by Rep. John Conyers in the 1980’s, by Rep. Tim Penney in the 1990’s, and by Rep. Ron Paul in 1997 as [HR 2477](#).

Helpful Background:

- No one in the country knows more about the ballot access obstacles than Richard Winger of [Ballot Access News](#).
- We also highly recommend this paper: “Death by a Thousand Signatures” by Oliver Hall, Esq. of the Center for Competitive Democracy.

Independent Citizens Redistricting Commissions

We support non-partisan independent citizens redistricting commissions (ICRC).

An ICRC measure [was passed in 2008](#) by California voters via a citizen-led statewide referendum. After six attempts, California got it right! A similar commission was passed by a citizen-led municipal voter referendum in the city of Austin in 2012.

→ Candidates for all offices should support this simple concept – take the redistricting pen out of the hands of politicians and give power to a randomly selected pool of qualified individuals screened by state or local auditors for conflicts of interest.

Helpful Background:

- Fairvote’s [website gives a good quick review](#). Based on our experience developing the Austin ICRC model, we can provide you lots of advice.

Municipal Petition Rights – Ordinary Texan’s Local Control

Most Texans do not know that Texans living in home-rule cities (cities with at least 5,000 population and a city charter) have a powerful tool – the right to petition for initiatives, referendums, recalls and charter amendments (commonly called “I&R”.) In 1912, as part of our constitutional amendment for home rule, Texans secured the right of municipal petitioning.

A bill in the 2015 legislative session, the [anti-petition bill HB2595](#), nearly gutted municipal petition rights. HB2595 came on the heels of the quick passage of HB40. HB40’s proponent was the oil and gas lobby, which demanded the Denton citizen-led initiative for setbacks of fracking facilities within the city limits be overturned. HB40 was a stunning successful attack on local municipal control by the all-powerful Texas oil and gas lobby.

LIV provided the glue for petitioners from all camps to kill HB2595 that had passed nearly unanimously in the Texas House. When it reached the Senate, activists ranging from the tea party to greens had the Senate Committee on Natural Resources looking like deer in headlights.

In 2017, Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston), introduced SB 488 to protect petition rights. Though it sailed through the Senate, with Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick’s support, it was obstructed in the House. Petition rights likely got caught in the war between Patrick and House Speaker Joe Straus.

In 2018, petition wars have broken out with the cities of Houston, Austin and San Antonio boldly interfering with petitioner's rights to petition at public libraries, illegal ballot language, and defiance of city charter protections for petitioning.

→ State candidates can pledge to oppose legislation designed to interfere with or to diminish Texans' petition rights and to support legislation recommended by LIV to protect petition rights.

Helpful Background:

- The Austin Bulldog, updated August 11, "[Council's Ballot Language Trigger's Lawsuit\(s\).](#)"
- San Antonio Express News, August 8, 2018, "[PAC seeks criminal charges for fire union, others for allegedly violating election law.](#)"

The Siege on Texas Groundwater

Groundwater permits have been issued to pump groundwater from our underground aquifers at unsustainable rates.. This is currently facilitated by state law, which elevates groundwater development over groundwater protection. Policy changes are needed to ensure our groundwater is sustainably managed and the property rights of landowners, especially smaller, rural landowners, are protected.

The Republican and Democratic Party 2018 platforms reflect activists in both parties are concerned about these issues. However, there is not enough support yet from the power centers of either party to overcome the overriding influence of the business lobby, particularly land and water speculators looking for profits from high-dollar projects. We believe political change will soon dilute special interests' hold over local and state government.

The 2019 Texas Legislative Session could be pivotal for a shift away from repeating the "California model" of failed groundwater policy leading to groundwater depletion.

Federal Level Concerns: Groundwater pumping at current and proposed levels will reduce stream flow, harm native species and trigger Endangered Species Act violations.

- Congress must make it clear that the surface-groundwater exchange will not be affected by the lack of clarity in Texas groundwater legislation.

Congress must also prod the Department of Interior and its Bureau of Land Management to protect groundwater on Federal lands, prevent government-owned groundwater rights from being given away to private developers, and in general protect the environment from harm.

- Congress should condition federal loans for water-related programs on States enacting groundwater rules regarding sustainability.

LIV urges:

- State water policy must seek a balance between conservation and protection of aquifers versus development of groundwater. We must legislatively determine, based on reliable science, how much water may be sustainably produced in perpetuity. Failing to determine the limits of sustainability will ensure depletion of the resource.
- Texas law currently makes permits that exploit groundwater resources and rural landowners extremely difficult to challenge. Landowners must not be denied access to the permitting process to complain about massive permits that result in a “taking” of their property, whether they are currently producing their groundwater or not.
- State water policy must be reformed to recognize:
 - excessive groundwater withdrawals, from any aquifer, must not be tolerated;
 - in all cases, the most efficient use of existing water supplies to meet realistic projections of demand must precede development of any new supplies; and
 - the development of sound regional water supply solutions should take precedence over the current practice of “cherry picking” distant aquifers at higher economic, environmental and social costs.

→ State Candidates: Pledge to join the LIV approved water reform coalition for the 2019 Texas legislative session, under discussion as we write. LIV is committed to joining with all stakeholders to carve legislation to reform groundwater laws and practices to achieve the above goals.

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 → State Candidates: Pledge to motivate your constituents to demand increased water efficiency and more protection for our aquifers, landowners and ratepayers, over costly movement of groundwater and reservoirs that primarily benefit private interests and irresponsible governmental entities.

→ State Candidates: Pledge to support legislative efforts to require an elected Board of Trustees for the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) and to subject the SAWS/Vista Ridge water supply project to a comprehensive, independent legal and financial review/audit. SAWS was created as a political subdivision with an appointed Board of Trustees, who act independent of City Council oversight and without accountability to the electorate when entering into economically, environmentally and socially irresponsible agreements such as Vista Ridge.

→ State Candidates and Federal Candidates: Pledge to support efforts to get the Governor involved in groundwater law and policy reform.

→ Federal Candidates: Pledge to help LIV develop strategies to protect water resources laid out in the section marked “Federal Level Concerns” above.

Helpful Background:

- Interim hearings in June 2018 held by Sen. Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water and Rural Affairs are a good indication that profiteering water marketers are getting a “fair” hearing as landowners and ratepayers are left to fend for themselves. ([See Senate Hearing video archive.](#))
- Watch the LIV’s “[I Oppose the San Antone Hose](#)” 17-minute video about the \$3.4 billion Vista Ridge 142-mile groundwater pipeline project that threatens two critically important central Texas aquifers -- the Simsboro *and* the federally-protected Edwards Aquifer.
- Independent Texans’ 2013 White Paper: [End the Urban v. Rural Water Wars, Vote No on Prop 6!](#)

Eminent Domain Reform

Eminent domain has long been a part of the Common Law. Governments must on occasion rely on this power to confiscate, with compensation, a private citizen’s property to complete necessary public infrastructure projects. While acknowledging the necessity, Texans have been careful to restrict the government’s ability to invoke eminent domain. The real danger is rarely direct abuse by political subdivisions; rather, the awesome power of government to invoke eminent domain is often corrupted by private parties covertly using it for private gain.

The Texas Legislature has often reaffirmed the private property rights of landowners, mandating a Landowners Bill of Rights in 2009, but has failed to enact additional needed reforms to protect landowner’s rights to fair treatment and compensation for private land taken through eminent domain.

LIV supported reforms put forth in the 2017 Texas legislative session by [Texans for Property Rights](#). As we write, the League and other property-rights advocates are also addressing abuses of the power of condemnation associated with water grabs for the 2019 session. Stay tuned for those developments.

Independents support adequate landowner and community notice. We also support giving district courts the power to review all evidence (aka *de novo* review) in a condemnation appeal, awarding attorney fees to certain landowners, prohibiting eminent domain seizures for “economic development”, and common carrier reform.

→ State Candidates: Support the protection of private property from government overreach and from the covert use of condemnation by private interests for personal gain.

→ State Candidates: Support the LIV and Texans for Property Rights agendas.

→ Federal Candidates: We do not suggest federal legislation on eminent domain reform. But we ask for your help to inform your constituents about LIV’s efforts for the state of Texas.

Helpful Background:

- Read this LIV report about the [disappointing 2017 Legislative Session](#) with regard to the failure of a seemingly formidable eminent domain coalition.