



SPOTLIGHT ON CIVILITY

As the time for our local elections approaches, the League of Women Voters of Weston looks forward to presenting information about the candidates and where each of them stands on important issues in our town. We welcome the discussions and debates that will take place around major issues. This process of presenting opposing points of view helps voters to understand the many different aspects of an issue and to make informed choices.

Disagreements and debates play an essential role in our democratic process, so it is necessary that voters, as well as elected officials, have the skills to disagree effectively ... and with civility.

What is civility?

Civility is about the way people treat each other. Civility involves the display of respect for those who hold opposing viewpoints, for those who disagree.

The key is to focus on the issues and not on the person. The debate should be about the strengths and weaknesses of proposed solutions to community problems. One should not engage in personal attacks against others who favor different solutions.

A democratic government runs on disagreements - and then on coming together to find common ground and moving ahead with solutions that benefit the community. For that process to take place, everyone needs to be respectful of those who present opposing ideas.

The National Institute for Public Discourse suggests that we apply the Golden Rule to our behavior in political discussions. (<https://goldenrule2020.org>)

Specifically, they recommend that each of us commits to the following guidelines on civil discourse:

I Will

- Always show respect for the other person
- Listen patiently and with curiosity to understand another's point of view—especially when there is disagreement
- Use precise and truthful language that communicates my views without exaggerating
- Look for areas of mutual agreement
- Encourage others including our political leaders to be civil

I Won't

- Use inflammatory words, or derogatory names
- Interrupt the other
- Make broad generalizations about individuals or groups
- Assault the character of others or falsely impugn their motives
- Question another person's beliefs, values or patriotism
- Demonize or describe as enemies, those who hold political beliefs different from my own

(https://goldenrule2020.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/02/GoldenRule_DosDonts_v2.pdf)

The free airing of differing points of view is a necessary element in our democratic society. And it is most successful when those holding opposing viewpoints treat each other with civility -- with dignity and respect.