

NRA Members' Councils of California

CANDIDATE ENDORSEMENT POLICIES AND MEMBERS' COUNCIL PROCEDURES

(excerpted from the Members' Council Handbook)

This section is composed of two sub-sections; Endorsement Policies and Members' Council Procedures. The Endorsement Policies sub-section contains an overview of the NRA policies regarding candidate endorsement and the Members' Council Procedures sub-section explains the techniques and methods whereby Members' Councils input their information and recommendations to NRA Staff, prior to endorsements being issued. *Note: Members' Councils do not issue endorsements. Only the NRA can issue endorsements.*

ENDORSEMENT POLICIES

The National Rifle Association endorsement policy for candidates running for elected office has been developed from years of staff experience and policies decided upon by the NRA Board of Directors. The NRA may choose to take an active part in any election within the State of California where elected government officials determine law and policies that affect the right of citizens to possess and use firearms for self-defense or other legitimate purposes.

The NRA will meet with and interview anyone running for office. The endorsement process starts when the filing deadline for the election has been reached. The NRA contacts the City/County Clerk or Secretary of State office and obtains an OFFICIAL candidate list. The NRA staff then sends ALL candidates a questionnaire that then has a fixed amount of time to return the completed and SIGNED questionnaire to NRA staff. If the candidate fails to return a questionnaire, the candidate will receive a grade of incomplete, which is the equivalent of an "F". Before the incomplete grade is given, however, the NRA staff will conduct a series of attempts to contact the campaign regarding the un-returned questionnaire.

There are some elected officials that, for legal or administrative reason, cannot or will not complete written questionnaires submitted to them. These offices include judges and some other judicial positions, in which cases the NRA does not officially endorse but can grade the candidates based upon their actions in office and inform the NRA membership.

NRA candidate endorsements are based upon the following;

- If a candidate is an incumbent or current officeholder, review will be based on voting records on firearms issues and legislation and/or hunting-related issues and legislation
- The verified public comments of candidates
- Personal interviews with NRA staff or designated volunteers
- Past endorsements by NRA
- Candidate questionnaire/survey

NRA candidate endorsements are **NOT** based upon the following;

- Endorsements by other organizations or individuals
- Positions on NON-NRA issues like abortion, taxes, immigration, etc.
- Memberships in firearms or hunting related organizations
- Partisan political affiliation
- Race, creed, color, religion or national origin

The next step in the endorsement process is comparing the candidates' information. In cases where research shows that there is no meaningful difference in candidate qualifications, NRA may stay neutral and inform the membership about the positions of the candidates.

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If the NRA endorses a candidate, the organization will take steps to facilitate and bring the candidate and the membership together during the course of the campaign. The NRA publishes a candidate grading and voting guide sheet that are distributed to the statewide NRA membership.

The NRA-affiliated gun clubs, hunting clubs and Members' Councils may **NOT** endorse candidates for any elected office in the name of the NRA or the NRA Members' Council. Members' Council Officers and Committee Chairs may not issue personal endorsements that identify their Members' Council position.

MEMBERS' COUNCIL PROCEDURES

Members' Councils do not endorse candidates, or other political measures. Instead, they submit their input to the Members' Council Program Administrator, so their recommendations can be considered by the NRA when endorsements are made by the appropriate NRA staff.

Members' Councils have ALWAYS been tasked with the researching, finding, interviewing, and passing on information to NRA staff, regarding candidates seeking public office. Some Councils do it well. Some, not so well. The method of input into the candidate endorsement process has never been as good as it can, and should, get.

Solution: Fix the problem by clarifying the process. The process is as follows:

- A Members' Council becomes aware of an upcoming election.
- The Council President appoints a "Campaigns and Elections Committee" and a Chair of that committee. The Chair would then complete a ***NRA Members' Council: Officer's/Committee Chairperson Policy Contract*** and return it to the Council Secretary for inclusion with the current month's minutes to the Members' Council Program Administrator. All members of this committee would then complete a ***NRA Members' Council: Confidential Data Usage Contract*** and return it to the Council Secretary for inclusion with the current month's minutes to the Members' Council Program Administrator. This committee can be comprised of any number Members' Council members, including a "committee of the whole" as directed by the Council President. Usually about three to seven committee members work fine. As in the case of all committees, except Membership and Communications, the Members' Council Vice-President coordinates (assists as necessary) this committee and is considered a member.
- After the "close of filing" (the deadline for submitting a candidate's name for a particular election), the Committee Chair assigns a committee member to acquire a list of all candidates running in the race and their contact information from the City Clerk, County Clerk, Registrar of Voters, etc. (as applicable).

This "official list" is then sent to the Members' Council Program Administrator along with whatever comments that the Committee determines are appropriate. The Program Administrator will forward the list and comments to NRA-ILA State Liaison Ed Worley, who has the responsibility of making endorsements in state and local races.

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- Ed Worley's office will then send out the Official NRA Questionnaires with a cover letter stating that ALL candidates have an equal opportunity and an equal time to answer the questions. Candidates' responses, or lack of responses, can affect their rating/endorsement with NRA.
- During this time, the Members' Council Campaigns and Elections Committee should interview all of the candidates and compile all information that is available regarding the candidates in the race. This is especially important if the candidate has held elected office before and might have a voting record on Second Amendment issues. Public statements that candidates might have made, newspaper articles and letters to the editor by (or about) the candidate, are important tools to judge a candidate's position also. Interviews can be "semi-formal" where the committee actually meets with the candidate and asks questions, or can be as "casual" as a phone call. Since non-endorsed candidates are not permitted to attend Members' Council meetings, interviews shall never be held concurrent with a Members' Council event/meeting. The committee should try to do the same kind of interview for all of the candidates in a given race. Fairness is as important as objectivity!
- The Members' Council Campaigns and Elections Committee will send the Members' Council Local or State Issue Survey to each candidate. *Note: Current office holders can be surveyed and interviewed in advance of the close of filing if they are expected to seek re-election or higher office.*
- After a committee has reviewed all of the available/necessary information they should refine and prioritize it so that it is easy to understand. The Committee Chair then reports to the Members' Council Vice-President and the Members' Council makes its recommendations.

These recommendations and the refined data are sent to the Members' Council Program Administrator for inclusion into a report to Ed Worley.

- Ed will consider the Members' Council's recommendations and input when making decisions regarding specific races.
- If endorsements are issued by NRA, the endorsed candidate is then permitted to be introduced to the members of the Members' Council. Other support (contributions, mailings, special meetings, etc.) might also occur.

Conclusion: If we use these guidelines to become involved with state and local races, the NRA Members' Councils will become even more effective and influential than in the past.