



Monday, April 14, 2025

Dear Members of the Senate & Governmental Affairs Committee:

The League of Women Voters of Louisiana writes to **OPPOSE** the following bill scheduled on the agenda of the Senate & Governmental Affairs Committee of the Louisiana Legislature for hearing at its meeting on Wednesday, April 16, 2025:

SB4 (Lambert) ELECTIONS: Authorizes political campaign signs to be posted on public school athletic fields and gymnasiums when a political candidate or campaign pays for the posting.

It is hard to envision the problem to which this bill is a response or any positive way it would contribute to democracy and fair elections. The bill simultaneously seems to (1) provide a shameless end run around anti-electioneering laws and likely local political sign ordinances, as well, while also (2) throwing the door wide open to pernicious influences of money on politics (3) in the context of a captive audience of school children and their parents, (4) quite possibly in violation of local ordinances on election signs and other displays.

For the last several years, until the building was mercifully cleaned and painted in apparent preparation for renovation, we had a building in Lafayette Parish that served a similar and very problematic function. The building in question was a private building in the middle of Lafayette's downtown at 1000 Lafayette Street, with only a small wooden shack separating it from being immediately adjacent to the 1010 Lafayette Street building, which is the location of the Registrar of Voters Office that also serves as the parish's primary early voting site.

For years before wiser minds (or the possibility of an imminent sale prevailed), the building had served as a bricks-and-mortar billboard for all manner of candidate signs in elections for office at every level. During the October 2023 primary election, both sides of the corner building were emblazoned with huge political signs. Some candidates had more than one on each side. A giant billboard of a failed mayor-president loomed precariously over the designated parking for early voters. It's likely a miracle that none of the enormous signs flew off the building and injured voters.

But alongside the potential for danger to life and limb from the signage, there was a clear and present danger to democracy. Being next to the ROV office, the sign-festooned building was directly across from the district courthouse in one direction and the sheriff's building in another. In fact, most of the buildings in the immediate area are government buildings. Many of the others belong to private attorneys who apparently have the good sense not to allow their offices to convey partisan political electioneering signage.

The location of political signs in a district of government buildings conveyed a message of government approval—and maybe even endorsement. At a minimum it suggested that the candidates had a good reputation with local government officials—or perhaps that they could afford a little kickback to the building owner in exchange for such valuable political real estate.

It is bad enough that a building, even a private one, amid such overwhelming government infrastructure was allowed to serve as a vehicle for such publicity. (In fact, a review of local government ordinances on political signage suggests that it likely violated the law.) But to allow candidates to “pay to play” by hanging their electioneering signage at public schools, where students and their parents must confront them nearly every day, particularly on athletic fields and gymnasiums that may play host to visitors from around the community and state? The very same schools that may also serve as voting precincts on Election Day? With all due respect, this is madness!

Our public schools in Louisiana (at least for as long as this Legislature continues to fund them!) don’t need to serve as forum for candidate electioneering and the impression of government endorsement to captive audiences of parents, children, and other community members—especially if the candidates pay for it themselves. What if one candidate takes up all the limited space? What provisions would be made to ensure candidates have equal access to these spaces? What about candidates who cannot afford this sort of “pay to play” electioneering? Why should we even be inviting more money into politics at all?

And we must also consider who pays for damage that such signage—especially if as ginormous as we have seen in Lafayette—might do if it causes an injury, becomes unsightly or damaged and needs to be removed? And does the candidate have liability insurance to cover anyone who might be injured on school property installing the electioneering signs? These are just a few of the questions that come to mind. We’ve recently had overly enthusiastic patriots in Lafayette using cherry-picker trucks to scale public lampposts to erect national and military flags under cover of darkness. Those had to come down under local ordinance. In Lafayette, we are very familiar with display issues, especially of the political sort. Like the insurance ad says, “We know a thing or two, because we’ve seen a thing or two.”

Let’s keep electioneering out of schools—whether paid for or not. The candidates can find other ways to advance their prospects without intruding on the nonpartisan character of our public schools. Our schools need to be free from such messages—regardless of who pays.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Christian Green". The signature is stylized with a cursive-like flow.

M. Christian Green
President, League of Women Voters of Louisiana
Chair, LWVLA Voting Rights Committee