



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS of the CALUMET AREA

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PRESS ADVISORY

OCTOBER 21, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE FACTS ABOUT THE HAMMOND MAYORAL DEBATE THAT NEVER OCCURRED

Hammond, Ind.—As part of its commitment to open government and the democratic process, the Calumet Area Chapter of the League of Women Voters, in partnership with WBEZ Chicago Public Radio, attempted to organize a debate between incumbent Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. and George Janiec, a candidate for mayor. The debate, that was originally scheduled for October 13th at the main branch of the Hammond Public Library, was canceled because of Mayor McDermott's failure to respond to repeated requests to participate.

While the debate was canceled solely due to the Mayor's lack of response, this press advisory presents the facts and details surrounding the failed effort to organize a mayoral candidates' debate in Hammond. In light of the rumors and conjecture associated with this event, the League believes it is important to provide a comprehensive and factual narrative of what happened. We apologize for the length of this advisory.

The League of Women Voters has a prescribed set of procedures and practices for organizing and moderating debates. These have been used for decades in organizing debates for the President of the United States, as well as in local municipal elections.

The first step in the process is to send a certified letter to each candidate using the address that the candidate provides when filing to run for office with the local election board. Certified letters were sent to Mayor McDermott and George Janiec on September 19th. The League tracked whether or not the certified letters had been accepted by candidates. George Janiec received his letter on September 24th after an unsuccessful attempt by the carrier to deliver it. Mayor McDermott's letter was not delivered, nor was there any evidence that delivery had been attempted, based on the United States Post Office's on-line tracking system. When neither candidate responded to the letter, the League's Voter Services Chair called and left messages with each of them on September 29th. George Janiec returned the call, stating he would participate in the debate.

However, the Voter Services Chair's call to Mayor McDermott went unreturned. With the debate date approaching, the League representative made in-person visits to the Mayor's City Hall office and to his campaign headquarters on October 3rd in an effort to deliver copies of the materials contained in the certified letter originally sent to the Mayor, a courtesy not ordinarily extended to a candidate. At the visit to the Mayor's campaign office, the copied materials were delivered to Marissa McDermott, the Mayor's spouse.

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Despite these efforts by the Voter Services Chair, Mayor McDermott never responded to the League's invitation to debate. Even after WBEZ reporter Michael Puente contacted the Mayor by phone to request a response, neither the Mayor nor his campaign responded. The certified letter originally sent to the Mayor was returned "unclaimed" to the League's post office box on October 7th.

The League's debate policy does not allow single-candidate debates. Accordingly, since only one candidate agreed to debate, the event was canceled. The Calumet Chapter of the League of Women Voters regrets having to make that decision.

For more than 90 years, the League of Women Voters has been a nonpartisan political organization encouraging the informed and active participation of citizens in government. We influence public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate.

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