

Take Action on Voting and Election Reforms

In keeping with the League's tradition as an advocate for voting rights and reforms, the League of Women Voters of Michigan (LWVMI) is celebrating its 90th Anniversary with a day devoted to learning about and advocating for ways to make voting more convenient and accessible.

Voting and Elections Training and Action Day will be held in Lansing on Wednesday, April 21st from 9:45 am to 4:00 pm. Highlights of the event include advocacy training conducted by Tim O'Brien, from the League of Women Voters US, and a 90th anniversary luncheon. At the luncheon, LWVMI will recognize champions of voting reforms and Rep. Joan Bauer will present a tribute to the League, in honor of the anniversary.

The morning agenda includes a briefing on the status of voting reforms in the Legislature, with emphasis on early and no excuse absentee voting. These measures would give voters the same conveniences offered in many other states and are supported by a large majority of Michigan voters. Participants will receive tips on how to advocate for these reforms and attend afternoon meetings with legislators to discuss the issues and ask for their support. Local Leagues are organizing delegations by legislative district and scheduling meetings with legislators in advance of the event.

The registration fee is \$10, lunch included, and registration can be completed on-line or printed and mailed to LWVMI (see box). To join a delegation for legislative visits, contact the local League in your community or email Kris Zawisza at voterpower@lwvmi.org.

Voting and Elections Training and Action Day

**Wednesday, April 21st
9:45 am - 4:00 pm
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
218 W. Ottawa St.
Lansing, MI 48933**

\$10 registration

[Click here to register](#)

'Snowbirds' Important to Michigan Census Count

Michigan, like other northern states, has plenty of "snowbirds" - that is, residents who travel to warmer climates during the winter months. In this census year, it is critical that the snowbirds who call Michigan their usual residence, answer the census form in their home state of Michigan.

Why is this important? Because Michigan can lose up to \$200 million in federal funds per year (\$2 billion per decade!) and may also lose a seat in the US House if snowbirds are not included in the Michigan census. Counting Michigan snowbirds as residents of another state reduces Michigan's political influence in Congress, reduces the level of federal funding received by state and local agencies, and reduces the accuracy of the census data.

LWVMI, a partner of the Michigan Nonprofit Complete Count Committee, offers this solution: Snowbirds receiving a census form at their winter retreat should enter "0" for the number of people living at their winter address and then write only these words, "Usual residence elsewhere" so the person reading the form understands why "0" was entered. When they return to Michigan, they can fill out the census form that was delivered to their Michigan address OR wait until a census worker visits them at their Michigan home. There is no penalty for having a census worker make a home visit.

According to the US Census Bureau, Michigan lost a Congressional seat in 2000 because of uncounted snowbirds. (["Snowbirds' crucial to accurate Michigan census, Detroit Free Press, 3/5/10](#))

Census forms are delivered to households, not to individuals. The form does not ask where you live, nor is there a place on the form to indicate a primary address if you respond to the form from your winter retreat. Every US resident should be counted by the census once, at the residence where they live most of the year.

Help Michigan be counted correctly! Please circulate this information to your snowbird friends so that Michigan can receive all the resources it deserves!

US Supreme Court Gives Corporations Unlimited Campaign "Speech"

On January 21st, the US Supreme court ruled that corporations can spend unlimited amounts on political campaigns, overturning federal campaign finance law and Supreme Court precedents. The decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*, was based on the 5-4 opinion of the Court that corporations have the same free speech rights as individuals and campaign contributions are a version of speech. Public interest groups and citizens were uniformly disturbed by the ruling and Congress immediately began considering legislation to limit its impact. Eighty percent of Americans oppose the ruling, according to a Washington Post-ABC news poll.

Mary Wilson, President of the League of Women Voters US, criticized the ruling saying, "the Court has unleashed into our elections tremendous sums of money from for-profit corporations that cannot possibly be matched in quantity by contributions from ordinary citizens. The only possible outcome of this is that big money and special interests will have an even tighter grip on our democracy."

Corporate special interests have been spending heavily in Michigan elections for the past decade, in the form of television issue advertisements sponsored by the political parties and Michigan Chamber of Commerce. These ads are not covered by State campaign finance law, which allows the contributors to remain anonymous. Rich Robinson, Executive Director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, estimates that about \$50 million has been spent on issue ads since 2000, much of which probably originated from corporations. The issue is not only how much more special interest money will be spent as a result of the Court's decision, but whether the public has a right to know who contributes.

The Court upheld federal requirements that corporations disclose their contributors, leaving the door open for disclosure requirements on the state level. Robinson says, "with spending restrictions gone, transparency is the public's only asset in the marketplace of campaign ideas; to evaluate campaign communications in light of their source...The Michigan Legislature has a chance to bring some measure of integrity to state political campaigns, or it can sit idly and surrender to unlimited, unaccountable corporate abuse of democracy. The state desperately needs new laws to require meaningful disclosure and regulate campaign coordination."

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Michigan Voter Power Campaign is a project of the League of Women Voters of Michigan.

MICHIGAN VOTER POWER CAMPAIGN
League of Women Voters of Michigan
200 Museum Drive, Suite 104
Lansing, MI 48933
517-484-5383
faircourts@lwvmi.org
www.lvwmi.org