

League of Women Voters seeks transparent redistricting process

By Jamie Brinkman for the Daily News | Posted: Friday, February 17, 2012 10:49 am

The Midland League of Women Voters met this week to hear a presentation about reforming the redistricting process in Michigan.

Susan Smith, president of the Michigan Chapter of the League of Women Voters, sought input from those attending the meeting on what they felt was the best way to handle redistricting. "Redistricting is important because how the lines are drawn determines who gets elected," she said. "The voters should be choosing their representatives, not the other way around."

During the presentation, Smith outlined suggestions received from the participants. The suggestions ranged from transparency to congruity and all with in-depth open discussion. "The League of Women Voters believes that, at a minimum, the process of redrawing the district lines needs to be transparent and provide for public engagement," Smith said.

One of the goals from the discussion involved getting the public directly involved through a series of potential meetings that would be broadcast live on a redistricting website.

A concern for Smith and many others was whether the changes should be made legislatively or as a constitutional amendment. "Any changes in the redistricting process must be brought about by legislation or constitutional amendment," Smith said. "While it's easier to change the law than to change the constitution, it's also true that changes in legislation can be reversed more easily than changes to the constitution."

A handout given at the meeting stated that the League had exhausted all opportunities in 2011 to educate the public about redistricting, but felt that the efforts had not had an impact on the legislative level. Although Smith felt that the League's efforts did not impact at the legislative level, she said the organization remains adamant in its effort to heighten public awareness about the issue.

"The League is having a number of educational public meetings across the state to talk about how Michigan currently conducts redistricting, how other states do it and to enlist opinions on what residents would like to see the Michigan redistricting process look like in the future," Smith said.

Michigan is among the states that use the legislative process for redistricting plans, but not all states do it the same way. "Twenty-two other states use a commission instead, and types of commissions vary from 'advisory' to 'independent'," Smith said.

Many citizens across Michigan — particularly those living in Detroit — are upset about the new borders chosen in 2011. A lawsuit has been brought forth by numerous organizations in Detroit stating that Gov. Rick Snyder and Secretary of State Ruth Johnson are in violation of the Voting Rights Act.

"Every 10 years, states are required to review their census data and to redraw the district lines for U.S. Congressional Districts and for the State House and the State Senate, if the existing districts do not meet the federal requirements of equal population. States must also ensure that the voting rights of minorities are protected as provided by the Voting Rights Act," Smith said.