

Michigan Voter Power

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Taking Action to Make Voting Convenient

More than 75 League members and friends gathered in Lansing on April 21st to learn about and advocate for ways to make voting convenient and accessible.

Todd Blake, City of Fremont Clerk, and Evan Hope, Delhi Township Clerk, briefed participants on the status of voting and elections legislation, with emphasis on early and no excuse absentee voting. Tim O'Brien, Specialist from League of Women Voters US, reminded participants that legislators want to hear from their constituents and provided useful tips and examples of effective advocacy.

The League celebrated its 90th anniversary with a luncheon at which Rep. Joan Baurer presented a Legislative Tribute to the League and LWVMI honored the following individuals:

**Take a look at coverage of
Voting and Elections Training
and Action Day on [Lansing
Online News](#)**

- Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land, *Vision Voter* award, for her commitment to making improvements to Michigan's elections process and making voting more convenient and accessible for voters;
- Rep. Kathy Angerer, Chair of the House Ethics and Elections Committee, *Visionary Voter* award, for her leadership in passing the No Reason Absentee Ballots bill (HR 4367) on a bipartisan vote; and
- Mildred Madison, President of the Detroit League, *Making Democracy Work* award, for her remarkable efforts and ultimate success in the Detroit City Council by District campaign.

After lunch, a group proceeded to the Capitol to observe the House in session. Several legislators acknowledged the League and participants from the floor. Advocates also held meetings with more than 35 legislators to discuss 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.

As Census Count Concludes, Focus Turns to Redistricting

**Play the [Redistricting Game](#)
to learn how a map maker**

can have more influence over an election than voters.

Census data collected over the next few months will serve as the basis for one of the most partisan political exercises undertaken by our government -- remaking Congressional, state, and local legislative districts. In Michigan, like many states, legislators are responsible for drawing the lines and have self-interest or partisan interest in the outcome. This process results in legislators choosing their voters, rather than voters choosing their legislators.

If the Legislature agrees upon a plan, the Governor has the authority to approve or veto it. If the Legislature and Governor fail to reach agreement, the Michigan Supreme Court decides the outcome, which has been the usual scenario. If past is prologue, Michigan's upcoming redistricting process will be conducted within the exclusive domain of legislative leaders, hidden from public view.

A recent study by the Rose Institute of State and Local Government entitled, "Redistricting in America, A State-by-State Analysis," highlights the role of non-legislative commissions, adopted in several states to loosen the grip of the Legislature on the process. The most substantive changes have taken place in Arizona and California, which created commissions that are largely independent from legislative involvement.

Bills recently sponsored in the Michigan Legislature by Representatives John Walsh (R-Livonia) and Mark Meadows (D-East Lansing) would vest the Legislative Service Bureau (LSB), a group of legal analysts, with responsibility for map-drawing. Approval of the maps would remain with the Legislature. Although a step in the right direction, testimony and discussion about the bills questioned the ability of the LSB, which works for the Legislature, to withstand interference from legislators.

Although redistricting is a challenging area for reform, there is much room for improvement and citizen advocates in several states are working on this issue. LWVMI supports a redistricting process that reduces partisan considerations in drawing boundaries, promotes citizen engagement in elections, and respects minority voting rights. Greater transparency in redistricting, limiting the role of the Legislature, and adding other voices to the process are necessary steps towards this goal. LWVMI will join other reform groups in Michigan in a redistricting outreach and education campaign this year and into 2011.

Disclosure of Election Expenditures Gains Momentum Following *Citizens United* Decision

On April 29th, US Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Representative Chris Van

Hollen (D-MD) introduced legislation to address problems resulting from the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the *Citizens United* case, which gave corporations the right to spend freely on political campaigns. The legislation comes on the heels of the US Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*, that corporations can spend unlimited treasury funds on political campaigns, overturning federal campaign finance law and Supreme Court precedents. The decision was based on the Court's opinion that corporations have the same free speech rights as individuals and campaign contributions are a version of speech. A subsequent poll found that 80% of Americans oppose the ruling. Comprehensive disclosure of campaign-related expenditures by corporations, labor unions, trade associations and non-profit advocacy groups, is a key provision of the bill. Bill highlights include:

- Corporations and unions would have to identify themselves on political ads they bankroll, and the CEO or top official would have to make "I approve this message" statements to prevent organizations from funneling money through shell groups to hide their identity.
- Foreign-controlled corporations and government contractors would be barred from spending money on elections. Political spending by companies that received government bailout money would be prohibited.
- Corporations and unions would have to disclose campaign-related spending on their websites and report that spending to shareholders and members.

"Campaign-related" spending includes expenditures for issue advertisements, currently a large and hidden area of special interest spending. The disclosure requirements are intended to identify the real source of the money for these types of expenditures. The measure would apply to federal campaigns and similar state legislation would be necessary to fully address the problem in Michigan.

(Adapted from information provided by the Midwest Democracy Network)

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MICHIGAN VOTER POWER CAMPAIGN

**League of Women Voters of Michigan
200 Museum Drive, Suite 104
Lansing, MI 48933**