

Summary of LWV Meeting on Redistricting – 2-6-17, Hathaway’s Hideaway

The place was packed (downstairs and also upstairs, with a speaker) and the crowd overflowed onto the sidewalk with some having to be turned away. Attendees needed to be League members or become members at the event. The League membership has more than tripled in the last couple of months, according to Nancy Schewe, LWV of AAA President. On 2-20, there will be a new member involvement fair. Info will follow via newsletter or email.

Sue Smith, VP of SWV of MI presented. The League has been working on this issue for some time, and there’s a lengthy process they must go through if they want to be both strategic and successful.

We are in the “Redistricting Education Phase.” The Michigan Redistricting Collaborative” (MRC), www.michiganredistricting.com, has been educating members and clients of many 501C3 orgs (non-profits that can accept tax-deductible donations) about the problems with the current system. They got a 450K grant from the Ford Foundation to do this with a goal of identifying 200K people in the State of MI who support redistricting and 1000 volunteer leaders. (They basically have achieved this goal and there’s a deadline of 2-17 to get the names in.)

The MRC Policy Committee has been trained and will meet in two weeks to work on developing a Redistricting Policy, which will need to be tested. She stressed the importance of words, and message testing: people don’t want to make voting “easier,” they want to make it “more convenient,” for example. The MRC hasn’t yet decided whether to push for 2018 or 2020.

The League is in contact with other states that have been successful and unsuccessful. They’ve also looked at polling date in Michigan, and have identified some media outlets. There is a process to develop a ballot proposal campaign that has some legal requirements. They want to do a Constitutional Amendment instead of Referendum because it would be more lasting.

Campaign Finance Law says that a Ballot Committee must be filed with the State of Michigan if there is intent to have a ballot proposal or if there’s expenditure of funds toward that goal. And a Treasurer must file Finance Reports.

Fund raising for a ballot campaign would be necessary. It will take 1.5 million to get on the ballot and there will be attorney fees and campaign costs of probably an additional 3 million.

Ballot proposal language must be developed (100 words max), and reviewed by a constitutional lawyer, and tested. The language must be submitted to the State Board of Canvassers, which examines the form, not the language. Then petitions are needed with

400K signature, and these must be validated so there are 350K valid ones. The petitions are only good for 180 days.

What can volunteers do now? Be a part of educating groups and orgs. There will be two “Train the Trainers” Workshops: Feb. 22 at 7 pm at Hathaway’s Hideaway, and March 4 from 10-12 at Westgate Library. Registration is required.

Sue emphasized repeatedly two things: The League is a non-partisan group, and we are in the education phase, NOT the ballot proposal phase.

K. Edgren