

## President's Column

By Denise Hartsough

### Barriers to Voting in Michigan

The Michigan Senate's swift passage of a bill to ban straight-ticket voting is a reminder that our state has erected many barriers to voting. Those of us who have voted only in Michigan may not realize that voting in other states is different.

### Voter Registration

Some states allow voters to register at the polls. Michigan requires voters to register at least 30 days prior to an election. Over half the states allow online voter registration. Michigan does not. We have to register in person or via mail. If you register by mail, you may not vote absentee until you have voted in person—unless you are overseas, have a disability, or are over age 60.

### Special Barrier for Students

*From the Secretary of State's website:*

*Michigan law states that the same address must be used for voter registration and driver's license purposes. That means, if the residence address you provide on the application differs from the address shown on a driver's license or personal identification card issued by the state of Michigan, the Secretary of State will automatically change your driver's license or personal ID card address to match the residence address entered on this form.*

This places a huge burden on college students from one community who go to school in another. They may choose to skip class and travel home to vote, or to jump through the hoops to secure an absentee ballot in their home town. Their other option is to register to vote with their college address. The problem with that is they will repeatedly have to update their driver's license, because college students usually live at several different addresses during their college years.

### Voting

Some states conduct their elections via mail. Nearly three-fourths of the states allow early voting. Some states allow no-excuse absentee voting. Michigan does none of these. Our state requires voters to come in person on the date of the election to their polling place, unless they have a state-approved reason for an absentee ballot and have secured it in advance. Additionally, voters in Michigan must present a photo id to vote. One may sign an affidavit saying one does not possess a photo id, but being asked for identification can be an intimidating deterrent to a voter.

### Voting Rights

Michigan shines in one area—it is more expansive than most states regarding voting rights for convicted criminals. Our state is among only 13 that restores voting rights to a convicted criminal immediately upon completion of a prison sentence.

The League of Women Voters of Michigan (our state League) has a position on election laws and takes the lead advocating on state issues. You, as an individual acting on your own behalf and not the League, may certainly convey your views on Michigan's election laws to your elected state officials.

## Calendar

### DECEMBER 2015

#### 1 LWVKA Board Meeting

The Park Club, 219 W. South St.

5:30 pm Food available for purchase

6:00 pm Meeting

269-599-1801 and denise.hartsough@gmail.com

#### Consensus on Constitutional Amendment Due

#### 3 Meet and Greet—

The Boatyard Brewing Co.

432 E. Patterson —5:30-6:30pm.

#### 9 Consensus Meeting : Money in Politics

5652 E. Brenda Lane, Parchment — 7:00pm

### JANUARY 2016

#### 9 Program Planning Meeting

Disability Network — 10am-12pm

*Note: Board meets on 1st Tuesday. Members are welcome to attend all Board Meetings.*

### Do you use a check-writing service to renew your LWVKA membership?

If yes, please make sure it is updated with the correct address:

LWVKA, PO Box 2106

Kalamazoo, MI 49003-2106

Paula Aldridge is no longer the treasurer for LWVKA and no longer lives at the address where dues were sent in the past. Please have your dues renewals sent to the League's PO Box.

*Thank you!*

★ Voter Outreach & Education ★

## Partisan Redistricting + Big Money = Less Democracy

By Denise Hartsough

The League of Women Voters of Michigan has made over 60 presentations around the state to help people

“ In Michigan, the majority political party in state government has the power to draw district lines. This means politicians choose their voters. ”

understand the impact of Michigan's current approach to drawing the districts for seats in the US House of Representatives, the Michigan Senate and Michigan House. LWVKA arranged four presentations: Town

Hall meeting on October 5 at the Kalamazoo Public Library, Westside Kiwanis on October 13, Kalamazoo Rotary on November 9, and Allegan Rotary on November 16. A total of 150 people heard the presentations.

In Michigan, the majority political party in state government has the power to draw district lines. This means politicians choose their voters. Districts are drawn to place many of the opposing party's voters into the fewest number of districts possible. Because each district has only one representative, this gives the opposing party fewer elected officials than would be expected, given its number of supporters.

For example, in 1991 in Texas, Democrats controlled redistricting. Republicans and Democrats each had 49% of the total votes for the US House of Representatives, but Republicans won only 9 seats while Democrats won 21. In 2012 in Michigan, Republicans controlled redistricting. Republicans had 46% of the total votes for the US House of Representatives and Democrats had 51%. However, due to the way districts were drawn, Republicans won 9 seats in Congress and Democrats won 5.

Partisan redistricting lets one political party overpower voters who support the other party. It also means that districts become “safe” for one party or the other—whatever party wins the primary in a particular district controls that district and will most likely win the general election. To have a voice at all, a voter from the minority party has to vote in the other party's primary. That person's vote in the general election has little chance of affecting the outcome of the election. This discourages voting.

Fortunately, Michigan still has a few competitive districts. Readers will recall that the 2014 race between Sean McCann and Margaret O'Brien for the 20th District State Senate seat was won by only 59 votes. Unfortunately, donors can anonymously focus enormous amounts of money on those few competitive races. This also undermines democracy, as Rich Robinson, Executive Director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, explained to LWVKA members and friends on November 19th. Huge amounts of money from anonymous individuals and families leave elected officials beholden to unnamed donors. When the public does not know the identity of large donors, it cannot discern if or when an elected official may use his or her office to favor those donors' interests.

Robinson detailed how a series of US Supreme Court decisions: a) have permitted “issue” advertising as free speech; b) overturned a ban of one hundred years on

“ Fortunately, Michigan still has a few competitive districts. ... Unfortunately, donors can anonymously focus enormous amounts of money on those few competitive races. ”

corporate ads for or against specific candidates; c) allowed aggregating the funds of political action committees into “Super PACs” operating as nonprofit organizations that do not have to report names of donors; and d) removed the \$128,000 limit on an individual's amount of giving to a PAC — as a fetter on free speech. In Michigan, the identity of contributors to judicial campaigns is not required posing yet another problem. Robinson pointed out that “transparency is our inoculation against corruption.” Lacking transparency, we have a sick system.

What can we do about changing Michigan's approach to redistricting and to political campaign donations? The League of Women Voters of Michigan suggests that we educate others, stay informed (sign on for updates at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)), express your opinion in the media, and keep on learning. Helpful sites: [www.brennancenter.org](http://www.brennancenter.org) and <http://crcmich.org>.

## ★ Issue Study &amp; Advocacy ★

# Money in Politics Consensus Meeting

By Paula Manley

LWVKA will be holding the consensus meeting on the LWVUS study update Money in Politics on Wednesday December 9, 2015 at 7:00pm at the home of Paula and Ken Manley, 5652 E. Brenda Lane, Parchment. The consensus questions with links to reading resources are included in this Bulletin. If you are unable to attend the consensus meeting, you may either complete the questions and email to Paula Manley at [pjmanley@hotmail.com](mailto:pjmanley@hotmail.com), or mail them to her at the above address.

“Join us  
December 9  
at 7pm.”

As we approach another election cycle, the issue of how campaigns are financed becomes even more important. Join us on December 9th as we discuss this relevant topic.

## Money in Politics Consensus Questions

### With Links to MIP Committee Papers

By Paula Manley

This update on Money In Politics builds on the League's current position on campaign finance. The consensus questions in Part I address the goals of campaign finance regulation in terms of democratic values. The questions in Part II relate to the extent to which First Amendment protections like free speech and freedom of the press should apply to various speakers and activities in the campaign finance context. Part III asks about methods of campaign finance regulation. You are asked to respond to the questions without regard for the Supreme Court's current views on the First Amendment. In responding to each question, please interpret the words in their most general sense. Keep in mind that the LWV intentionally words positions that are derived from member study in the broadest possible way so that our positions have relevance for

many years. Future national Boards will determine when and how to apply our positions.

An optional comment section is included at the end of each of the three parts. Please note that while comments will be read and considered, only responses to questions can be tabulated.

Because issues around Money in Politics and its First Amendment implications are so complex, there is some overlap in the topics covered in the background papers. For each of the three question parts below we have matched papers to provide helpful background information on those topics. All of the readings can be found at <http://forum.lwv.org/category/member-resources/our-work/money-politics-review>.

### PART I QUESTIONS: Democratic Values and Interests with Respect to Financing Political Campaigns

#### Background Readings

Here are readings that provide background on the issues that the Part I questions are asking about:

- **Money in Politics: Introduction and Overview**  
(<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-mip-introduction-and-overview>)
- **Shifts in Supreme Court Opinion about Money in Politics**  
(<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-shifts-supreme-court-opinion-about-money-politics>)
- **The Role of the Supreme Court in Interpreting the Constitution**  
(<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-role-supreme-court-interpreting-constitution>)
- **Evidence of Spending's Impact on Electoral and Legislative Outcomes Corruption and Rationales for Regulating Campaign Finance** (<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-corruption-and-rationales-regulating-campaign-finance>)

#### 1. What should be the goals and purposes of campaign finance regulation?

(Please respond to each item in Question 1.)

- a. Seek political equality for all citizens.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- b. Protect representative democracy from being distorted by big spending in election campaigns.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- c. Enable candidates to compete equitably for public office.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus

Continued on page 4

## Money in Politics Consensus Questions, continued

- d. Ensure that candidates have sufficient funds to communicate their messages to the public.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- e. Ensure that economic and corporate interests are part of election dialogue.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- f. Provide voters sufficient information about candidates and campaign issues to make informed choices.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- g. Ensure the public's right to know who is using money to influence elections.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- h. Combat corruption and undue influence in government.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus

### 2. Evaluate whether the following activities are types of political corruption:

*(Please respond to each item in Question 2.)*

- a. A candidate or officeholder agrees to vote or work in favor of a donor's interests in exchange for a campaign contribution.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- b. An officeholder or her/his staff gives greater access to donors.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- c. An officeholder votes or works to support policies that reflect the preferences of individuals or organizations in order to attract contributions from them.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- d. An office holder seeks political contributions implying that there will be retribution unless a donation is given.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- e. The results of the political process consistently favor the interests of significant campaign contributors.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus

OPTIONAL COMMENTS (250 word limit):

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## PART II QUESTIONS:

### First Amendment Protections for Speakers and Activities in Political Campaigns

This set of questions is designed to determine the extent to which the First Amendment protections of free speech and freedom of the press should apply to different speakers or activities in the regulation of campaign finance. Free speech and free press provide essentially the same protections to speakers, writers, publishers and advertising, whether or not they are part of the institutional press, and largely regardless of the medium. Essentially, these protections extend to any conduct that is expressive. Many of the options below would be found unconstitutional by the current Supreme Court, but we are seeking your League's views, not those of the Court. These are broad, overarching questions about spending to influence an election, including independent spending, contributions to candidates, broadcast news and other communication expenditures.

#### Background Readings

Here are readings that provide background on the issues that the Part II questions ask about:

- **The First Amendment** (<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-first-amendment>)
- **The Debate: Can Government Regulate Money in Politics?** (<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-debate-can-government-regulate-money-politics>)
- **Hard, Soft and Dark Money:**
  - Independent Expenditures** (<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-independent-expenditures>)
  - The New Soft Money**, pp. 17-27  
(<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/new-soft-money-daniel-p-tokaji-renata-e-b-strause-e-book>)

## Money in Politics Consensus Questions, continued

**1. Many different individuals and organizations use a variety of methods to communicate their views to voters in candidate elections. Should spending to influence an election by any of the following be limited?**

*(Please respond to each item in Question 1.)*

- a. Individual citizens, including wealthy individuals like George Soros and the Koch Brothers.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- b. Political Action Committees, sponsored by an organization, such as the League of Conservation Voters, Chevron, the American Bankers Association, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), whose campaign spending comes from contributions by individuals associated with the sponsoring organization, such as employees, stockholders, members and volunteers.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- c. For-profit organizations, like Exxon, Ben and Jerry's, General Motors, and Starbucks, from their corporate treasury funds.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- d. Trade associations, like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Wind Energy Association, and the American Petroleum Institute, from the association's general treasury funds.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- e. Labor unions, like the United Autoworkers and Service Employees International, from the union's general treasury funds.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- f. Non-profit organizations, like the Sierra Club, Wisconsin Right to Life, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, American Crossroads, and Priorities USA, from the organization's general treasury funds.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- g. Non-partisan voter registration and GOTV (get out the vote) organizations and activities, like the LWV and Nonprofit Vote.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- h. Political parties, like the Republicans, Libertarians, and Democrats.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- i. Candidates for public office spending money the candidate has raised from contributors.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- j. Candidates for public office spending their own money.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus

**2. The press plays a major role in candidate elections through editorial endorsements, news coverage, and other communications directly to the public that are often important to the outcome. Should such spending to influence an election by any of the following be limited?**

*(Please respond to each item in Question 2.)*

- a. Newspapers, like the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- b. Television and other electronic media, like Fox News, CNN, MSNBC and CBS.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus
- c. Internet communications, like Huffington Post, Breitbart, Daily Kos, and individual bloggers.  
 Spending banned    Some spending limits    Unlimited spending    No consensus

OPTIONAL COMMENTS (250 word limit):

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## Money in Politics Consensus Questions continued

### PART III QUESTIONS: Methods for Regulating Campaign Finance to Protect the Democratic Process

#### Background Readings

Here are readings that provide background on the issues that the Part III questions are asking about:

- **Options to Reform Money in Politics: Action in the States**(<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/money-politics-action-states> )
- **Enforcement of Federal Campaign Finance Law.**

#### 1. In order to achieve the goals for campaign finance regulation, should the League support?

(Please respond to each item in Question 1 a and b.)

- a. Abolishing SuperPACs and spending coordinated or directed by candidates, other than a candidate's own single campaign committee.  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- b. Restrictions on direct donations and bundling by lobbyists? (Restrictions may include monetary limits as well as other regulations.)  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- c. Public funding for candidates? Should the League support: (You may respond to more than one item in Question 1 c.)
- i. Voluntary public financing of elections where candidates who choose to participate must also abide by reasonable spending limits?  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- ii. Mandatory public financing of elections where candidates must participate and abide by reasonable spending limits?  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus
- iii. Public financing without spending limits on candidates?  
 Agree  Disagree  No consensus

#### 2. How should campaign finance regulations be administered and enforced?

(You may choose more than one response for Question 2.)

- a. By an even-numbered commission with equal representation by the two major political parties to ensure partisan fairness (current Federal Election Commission [FEC] structure)?
- b. By an odd-numbered commission with at least one independent or nonpartisan commissioner to ensure decisions can be made in case of partisan deadlock?
- c. By structural and budget changes to the FEC (e.g., commission appointments, staffing, security, budget, decision making process) that would allow the agency to function effectively and meet its legislative and regulatory mandates.
- d. No consensus.

OPTIONAL COMMENTS (250 word limit):

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## Save the Date

By Fran Eckenrode

The upcoming Founder's Day Brunch will be Saturday, February 13, 2016, at Henderson Castle from 10:30 am until noon. Plan to join the celebration at one of Kalamazoo's most beautiful landmarks.

## Money in Politics Town Hall

By Fran Eckenrode

Money in Politics was the topic at the Kalamazoo Public Library on November 19. **Rich Robinson**, Executive Director of the *Michigan Campaign Finance Network*, delivered a compelling presentation on political campaign spending in Michigan and how wealthy individuals are responsible for a large share of that spending. His data clearly illustrated how accountability is being obscured by the use of political nonprofit corporations, non-disclosing party committee, and superPACs. This fall, Leagues throughout the nation are examining the issue of Money in Politics in an effort to reach member consensus and to update the LWVUS position on campaign finance. **The LWVKA Money in Politics consensus meeting will be held December 9.** Time and location will be announced. The study guide is available at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org).

## Sisters Across the Straits— LWV Delegation Visit to Cuba

By Paula Manley

Ken and I had the opportunity to join Leaguers from California, Texas, Wisconsin, Maine and Florida to travel to Cuba in early November. The LWV of Florida Education Fund has offered Sisters Across the Straits trips to



Cuba for the past five years under the People to People program. Our leader and League member Annie Betancourt has a unique perspective as she and her family left Cuba in 1960 when she was thirteen years old. She offered a great deal of information about the pre Castro days and the changes since. Our tour guide, a government employee, is a thirty-two year old Cuban who has only known the Castro regime. However, he

seemed to be comfortable sharing thoughts about some of the areas he would like to see changed and improved.

We had the opportunity to meet with various groups to exchange thoughts on U.S.-Cuba relations, civic engagement, the role of women in Cuba today and to learn Cuba's history and culture. We met with Dr. Rosa Lopez Ocegüera on the faculty of the University of Havana, the Cuban UN Association, the Federation of Cuban Women and Isabel Moya, editor at the publishing house de la Mujer. On our last evening in Havana, we had dinner with the CBS Bureau Chief, Portia Sigelbaum, who has resided in Cuba for many years and offered her perspective as a journalist.

Cuba is a country with a rich history and vibrant culture. It is slowly evolving from a Socialist regime under Raoul Castro's leadership. Cubans all receive salaries of \$30 per month except for doctors who receive \$80 per

“ The LWV of Florida Education Fund has offered Sisters Across the Straits trips to Cuba for the past five years under the People to People program. ”



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# MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK!

## Sisters Across the Straits, continued

month. They have free education from preschool through the university or trade school training. Also, everyone receives free medical care. However, food is still rationed and each person has a monthly ration card. Until recently, everything was run by the government. Farmers are now allowed to sell some produce privately in farmers' markets so that a Cuban with a little extra money can buy additional food at the market. Restaurants called Paladars, which are privately run in homes, tend to be better than the government-run restaurants. Cuba has a dual currency system where Cubans use the peso and foreigners use CUC (Cuban Convertible Peso) currency. To further complicate currency issues, the Cuban government must use hard currency such as Euros in trading with other countries. It would seem that the present currency system could be a barrier to foreign businesses wishing to invest in Cuba.

Cuba is at a crossroads as the relations between our two countries are changing. It was an interesting time to travel to Cuba and to engage in lively discussions with fellow Leaguers and our Cuban counterparts.

## #GIVINGTUESDAY™

December 1, 2015

This year, the League will participate in the fourth annual #GivingTuesday campaign on December 1, 2015. In the same way that retail stores come together to offer deals on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, #GivingTuesday brings the nonprofit community together on a universal platform to raise awareness about the importance of supporting our valuable missions and work. Visit [lwvka.org](http://lwvka.org) to make your year-end contribution.

## LWVKA Board for 2015-2016

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