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Midland Voter

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE MIDLAND AREA

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Newsletter

CALENDAR 2008

October	Distribution of Voter Guides, Midland Daily News and other locations
Oct. 20	General Election Candidate Forum: City Council Chambers, MCTV, 7:00 p.m.
Oct. 21	“Media in the Political Process:” Delta College Lecture Theater, 10:00 a.m.-noon Paul Glastis, “Washington Monthly;” Stephen F. Hayes, “The Weekly Standard”
Nov. 4	VOTE - Election night live coverage from County Building on MCTV
Nov. 5	Board Meeting at Carole Swinehart’s home: 5315 Sunset Drive, 1:00 p.m.
Nov. 12	Forum on State prisons, Grace A. Dow Library Lounge, 7:00 p.m.
Dec. 3	Board Meeting and Holiday Potluck at Carole Swinehart’s home: 5315 Sunset Drive, 4:00 p.m., Board Meeting; 6:00 p.m., Dinner

Remember LWV meetings are open to the public. Bring a friend.

ELECTION ACTIVITIES TOP PRIORITY FOR LWV IN OCTOBER

STATE PRESIDENT UPDATES MEMBERS

Midland Leaguers were treated to a lively review of LWV State Board preparations for the upcoming elections by President Jessica Reiser at the meeting on September 17 at Café American. She noted that currently the Board’s most urgent work is finalizing the State Voter Guide which will include races for US Senate and House, State Representatives, Judges, State Board of Education and ballot proposals. Over 120,000 copies will be distributed throughout the state and CDs sent to local Leagues such as Midland for their own Voter Guides.

Reiser was enthusiastic about the Voter Advocacy Protection Grant which is making it possible for Leagues throughout the state to offer registration assistance to underserved citizens in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and for a project in Detroit where irregularities in voter access have been reported in the past. She also noted that LWVUS has produced a Presidential General Election Voter Guide at www.lwv.org.

MIDLAND PARTICIPATES IN PROJECT

As part of the state project with the DHS, seven local League members spent Tuesday, September 16, registering voters at the Midland DHS office. While case workers can provide information, they are often busy with client needs. Having a designated place where voter information is available to clients before a general election is very helpful. Thanks to Evelyn Lipowitz, Jean Treadway, Carol Locker, Donna DeVinney, Fran Hamburg and Carole Swinehart who all felt it was time well spent.

COME TO OCTOBER 20 FORUM

How about coming to the Candidate Forum at Midland City Hall on Monday, October 20 at 7:00 p.m. instead of watching at home on MCTV? It’s good for candidates and MCTV audience to see the strength of the League in numbers and the importance attached to the forum. Rebroadcasts will give us an even larger audience. See you there!

GREETINGS FROM THE THIRD (and unofficial) LEG OF THE TRIANGLE

I have been shedding responsibilities this year and am now concentrating on advocacy for the State Board and the local website. Here follows a brief report on more activities at the LWVMI:

At the September State Board meeting, with the November election looming, Voter Service was the predominant topic. In addition to the regular State Voter Guide, the office is working with Publius to get information on the web at www.lwv.publius.org. They hope to have links to local League websites and other general information. They are looking for volunteers to help key in the data. It is not difficult and can be done on your own time and at your own computer. More information is coming on how to volunteer. The Publius website will be linked to our revamped website at www.lwv-midland.org

During October in Kalamazoo, Dearborn and Holland/Grand Haven, three forums on Fair and Impartial Courts are scheduled. This is a joint project with the Michigan Campaign Finance Network funded with a grant from the Joyce foundation to educate the public on the problems with the current election of State Supreme Court Justices and to build support for public funding of these elections. This is an ongoing commitment and we will be hearing more in the coming year.

Besides per member payments from local Leagues and individual contributions, LWVMI depends primarily on grants to support its work and, while the situation has improved over the past few years, we dream of the day when we have sufficient staff to relieve the president, treasurer and other board members of hours of routine chores. We often spend the last half hour of the day stuffing envelopes. The meetings are held on the second Saturday of the month in Lansing from 9:30 a.m. to approximately 3:00 p.m. Guests are welcome and I would appreciate the company. You might even work in a little shopping during part of the day. Too few of us have a clue as to what the State Board does and where our dues money goes. Please call me if you are interested.

Fran Hamburg, Vice President for Advocacy LWVMI

STATE LEAGUE UPDATE ON PRISONS TOPIC OF NOVEMBER MEETING

LWVMI (and that means us) adopted a prison position in 1991, revised in 1997, and regarding the death penalty in 2005. At the state convention in 2007 we agreed to update it in 2009 as new issues such as services provided, privatization, sentencing guidelines and health care of prisoners have emerged. Sheriff Jerry Nielsen and a representative from the Michigan Department of Corrections will present information at a forum at the Grace A Dow Library, November 12 at 7:00 p.m. The Michigan Department of Corrections oversees county jails and, since Midland is about to have a new jail to be run with new programming, this should be of particular interest here.



TIGHT BUDGETS AHEAD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

League members who met in March to recommend 2008-09 program ideas to the Board chose Voter Service and Climate Change. They also suggested interest in following the budget problems with local governments and schools because of the final settlements of the tax appeals with the three largest local property taxpayers. Julie Schmidt agreed to follow up on the subject and reports the following about Midland County and City budgeting. School information will follow later.

League Interests

The budgets of our city, county and public schools are facing deep cuts which may come in areas where we hold local League positions so it is important to watch carefully this year as we may

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Midland, 6220 Jefferson is offering a three-part series on the voting process with Norb Bufka, author of "**Moral Values and Soundbites**" September 30, October 7 and 14 at 7:00 p.m. For details, contact Becky Carlson 631-3741.

find places where we will want to testify when specific cuts are announced.

Midland's three largest property tax payers, MCV, The Dow Chemical Company, and Dow Corning Corporation filed tax appeals in the late nineties claiming their properties were over-assessed. The last of the appeals was settled with MCV by the Michigan Tax Tribunal in April. Midland County will refund about \$19.6 million, the city of Midland \$36.2 million, and Midland Public Schools \$2.9 million. Midland County ESA, Delta College and the state of Michigan also must return taxes collected during the time questioned.

Midland County Budget

Besides the tax settlement, a down-turning economy and inflation have pushed the taxable value of the County down by over ten percent. County Administrator/Controller Dave Benda told the Board of Commissioners that about \$2.6 million cuts must be made just to make up for the MCV settlement costs. Hearings are going on with county departments which have already begun reducing their budgets by limiting overtime, printing and postage expenses and other items. In addition, the state government is shifting more cost burdens onto local units. County union contracts and other needs will make it difficult to impose a blanket budget solution such as ten percent cuts in all departments.

City Budgeting Plans

The city of Midland will need to pay about \$1.7 million a year to refund the tax money to MCV. Property tax rates, now at 12.99 mills might have to jump to 14.79, a 14% hike, just to maintain the current level of services. Budget Roundtable discussions will be held in October to help the city decide which services to maintain or drop and whether and how much to increase taxes. Some trimming has been done this year, with little direct impact on services except for the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library which is cutting back its purchases of books and materials. Anyone interested in Roundtable discussions can call: 837-5707 or visit: www.midland-mi.org.

League Action proposed

This is a good year for League members to join Roundtable discussions or attend County Board of Commissioners or City Council meetings and report

on what is happening. The Observer program has been a part of our local activities over the years and requires only that a member attend the meeting, observe the proceedings and give feedback. Anyone interested in learning more, please contact Julie Schmidt: 631-1173 or jschmidts@chartermi.net

LWVMI SIGNS PETITION TO SUPPORT CARBON DIOXIDE REDUCTIONS

The Board of the League of Women Voters of Michigan voted at its September meeting to sign on to a petition to Governor Granholm sponsored by the Sierra Club and other groups, including Midland Cares. The petitions ask for a commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 25% by the year 2025 and to prevent the permitting of more coal plants until stronger protections are put in place. This action is based on the LWVUS position calling for a ten-year moratorium on coal fired plants. A similar petition addressed to state legislators is available for individuals to sign at: <http://progressmichigan.org/page/speakout/coalrush>



GOOD READ

The Warden Wore Pink by Tekla Dennison Miller, 1996 was first recommended by Marilyn Brown, a former Midland League member now living in Durango CO. The author now lives in Durango where she also is a member of the League. This is a fascinating book about a very untraditional career pursued with intelligence, drive and much humor. Tekla Miller worked in the Michigan Department of Corrections becoming the first female Warden of an all male prison. In following her career, one learns of the gender discrimination she faced and much about the history of Michigan prisons. It fits well into our upcoming review of Michigan prisons. Carole Swinehart

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