



Eight Ballot Measures We *Would* Like to See

By Joseph G. Lehman

Summary

The Reform Michigan Government Now ballot initiative was rejected by the Court of Appeals, but there are ballot issues that taxpayers should consider pursuing, given the Legislature's unwillingness to do so.

Main Text Word Count: 710

The recent Michigan Court of Appeals ruling that keeps a sweeping reform of state government off the ballot has focused attention on the ballot measure process itself. The proposal, called Reform Michigan Government Now, was rejected for technical reasons but it was also extraordinarily bad public policy. However, that doesn't mean citizen-led initiatives are bad. In fact, the right ballot measures would let voters go over the heads of legislators who are proving themselves unwilling or unable to fix Michigan's urgent fundamental problems.

Here are eight ballot measures that would each offer voters a single, honest, straightforward opportunity to fix something that's not working well in Michigan. Over the years, Mackinac Center analysts have recommended each of them as good policy.

- *Right-to-Work.* A right-to-work law means that employers cannot agree to fire a worker for not supporting a union. Unions retain their monopoly bargaining status, but right-to-work protection is one step toward workplace fairness and state economic recovery. From 2002 to 2007, Michigan lost 5 percent of its jobs while the 22 right-to-work states increased their payrolls by 9 percent.
- *State Spending Limitation.* Allow state spending to increase, but only in proportion to growth in population and inflation. If a version of this plan had been in effect, it would have returned about \$8 billion to Michigan taxpayers from 1995-2007 and built a \$2.5 billion rainy day fund.
- *Universal Education Tax Credit.* A plan we proposed in the late 1990s would leave intact the constitutional prohibition on vouchers while allowing parents to choose the safest and best public or private schools for their children. The tax credit would be available for income earners, property owners and businesses who support the education of a child attending the school of his or her choice. The credit would be limited to half of the state's per-pupil spending allotment, which we estimated would have saved the state's School Aid Fund more than \$500 million in the 10 years prior to 2008.
- *Compensation for Regulatory Takings of Property.* Property regulations can be an invisible tax that chases businesses from the state or



In July, the Mackinac Center discovered on a union Web site a PowerPoint presentation that explained the real motives behind Reform Michigan Government Now. Above is the first slide in that presentation.

them from locating here in the first place. For example, overzealous wetlands regulation can effectively “take” property from its owner by severely restricting its use. One way to better balance the public benefit and private cost of such regulations would call for governments to either compensate a property owner for legal restrictions placed on property, or let the owner use the land as intended.

- *Paycheck Protection.* When unions take dues right out of worker paychecks, some of those dollars inevitably get spent on politics. For example, the MEA took \$66.6 million from school employee paychecks in 2007 and it spent \$2.3 million on politics that year (not counting PAC money, which is separate). Paycheck protection would require the union to get workers’ consent first.
- *Right-to-Work, Limited to Public School Teachers.* Gov. John Engler told the Legislature in October 1993 that no teacher should lose his or her job for deciding not to support a labor union. MEA disbursements in 2007 totaled \$124.7 million, of which it reported spending \$16.4 million on representation and \$56.3 million on overhead.
- *Supermajority or Voter Approval of Tax Increases.* Sixteen states have at least some sort of legislative supermajority requirement to raise taxes. One innovative proposal would require voter approval of all tax increases unless passed by a 3/5 supermajority of both houses. This likely would have prevented last year’s highly unpopular \$1.4 billion tax hike.
- *Part-time Legislature.* Little evidence suggests that Michigan would be less well governed with a part-time Legislature like those in 40 other states. In 2007 our state lawmakers became the second-highest paid in the nation.

Michigan is one of just 27 states where residents can vote directly on constitutional and certain legislative questions, and one of only 15 states that let the people enact and overturn laws and constitutional amendments. Yet, most Michigan voters aren’t aware they can wield such legislative power.

Michigan lawmakers are unlikely to pass any of these eight ideas into law any time soon, even though a case can be made that each one would help turn around Michigan’s moribund economy. Sometimes the people have to act when legislators won’t.

#####

Joseph G. Lehman is president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute headquartered in Midland, Mich. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the Center and the author are properly cited.

Michigan lawmakers are unlikely to pass any of these eight ideas into law any time soon, even though a case can be made that each one would help turn around Michigan’s moribund economy. Sometimes the people have to act when legislators won’t.

**Attention
Editors and Producers**

Viewpoint commentaries are provided for reprint in newspapers and other publications. Authors are available for print or broadcast interviews. Electronic text is available at www.mackinac.org. Please contact:

Michael D. Jahr
Director of Communications
140 West Main Street
P.O. Box 568
Midland, Mich. 48640

Phone: 989-631-0900
Fax: 989-631-0964
www.mackinac.org
Jahr@mackinac.org