



Discussion Topic

June 2006

A monthly resource for the Community Action Groups of Michigan Farm Bureau

How many ballot proposals are too many?

Michigan voters may have to spend a little more time in the booth if 11 proposed initiatives make it onto the ballot in November.

The potential numbers are a far cry from California's infamous 27 measures during the last national election, but Michigan still could face several referendums that would change the state's constitution, according to Doug Ewald, public policy and election specialist with Michigan Farm Bureau.

"It is not an easy thing to change the constitution, and it shouldn't be taken lightly," he said. "Remember that once a constitutional change is made, it's tough to reverse it."

So far, Ewald said, only four statewide ballot proposals have been approved to appear before the public in the Nov. 7 general election, but another appears to be certain. Six others, Ewald said, are still in the process of being approved by the state Board of Canvassers.

Among the initiatives that would change the constitution is one that would establish trust funds for conservation, recreation, game and fish; another that would end affirmative action guidelines for state university admission and state hiring; one that restricts the state's eminent domain powers; one that would legalize marijuana; an anti-abortion proposal; and one that would establish a unicameral legislature that would abolish the state Senate.

Bringing such issues before voters is the right of citizens, Ewald said, but we have elected officials whose job is to make laws.

"At some point, you have to wonder why proposals are trying to circumvent our representative form of government," he said. "Besides, one way a proposal gets on the ballot is when legislators pass resolutions to put sensitive issues before the voters."

While it appears unlikely that all 11 proposals will appear before the electorate, even a few proposals can confuse voters, Ewald said.

"The risk you take when there are too many proposals is that voters may just skip the issue," he said. "Even worse is if they vote based on a catch-phrase they may have heard or vote what seems good at the time without doing any investigation about the issue. We would hope that all voters would research their choices thoroughly, because better decisions are made by informed voters."

Ewald said there also is the risk that a bad public policy initiative may slip in among the many proposals and get lost in the crowd.

"We can't say how many ballot proposals are too many," he said, "but nobody wants to go into the booth confused and then feel rushed to make a decision. If we bog voters down with too many decisions, we may find ourselves with a voting public that's less informed before stepping into the booth, and that can be dangerous."

QUESTIONS

1. How many ballot proposals do you believe are too many to enable voters to make informed decisions?
2. Why do some groups try to go around the legislative process to get issues on the ballot?
3. In your opinion, are most voters properly informed about issues on which they'll vote? Should they vote at all if uninformed?