

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin

19 January 2007

Representative Josh Zepnick
Room 219 North, State Capitol
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Zepnick,

We appreciate your invitation to support, or at least comment on, a bill instituting a Voter Holiday. Members of our legislative committee have considered the idea and have expressed a number of practical and philosophical concerns.

Current Wisconsin law already mandates employers give time off for their employees to vote. This is true in 29 other states but the effectiveness of this arrangement has never been measured. Some of our members are concerned that citizens would use a day off as an extended holiday, actually decreasing voter turnout. This thought is echoed in several articles which discuss the reforms suggested by Presidents Ford and Carter, advisors to the National Commission on Federal Election Reform.

We are one of the few western democracies that do not schedule elections on weekends or a designated holiday. Those countries that do have a higher percentage of voters turn out. Before instituting a Voter Holiday, however, we should consider whether their increased turnout is due to easier access or to a different culture surrounding electoral participation.

As you know, the League of Women Voters has a long history of encouraging public participation in government at all levels. We strongly believe that elections will continue to lose significance for voters unless a political spirit is supported year-round through public education, civic dialogue and accurate information. We believe that this political spirit will not be aided by designating one day for civic participation. In this vein, we advocate year round for voting rights and campaign finance and ethics reform at all levels of government, and helping to ensure that all citizens may exercise their right to vote. Currently, our efforts regarding voting are focused on preserving voting rights, including Election-Day registration. Also, we are working to raise awareness of the ongoing need for qualified poll workers.

We have listed a few ideas that are part of our ongoing quest to encourage an informed public and effective democracy. We look forward to continuing the exchange of ideas with you and other legislators who give your time and talents to help us govern ourselves.

Sincerely,

Clare McArdle
Chair, Legislative Committee