

The Benzie Kicker

Newsletter of the Benzie County Democratic Party

Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 2016

Benzie County Democrats: working inclusively and creatively for the betterment of all



Join us now

Enclosed in the mailed version of this "Kicker" is an envelope for use in updating your membership. If you receive a mailed newsletter, please fill out the envelope and mail with your contribution to Treasurer Bruce Ogilvie at PO Box 403, Beulah, MI 49617.

Also see fund-raising story on page 4.

*Standing up for Flint in Lansing. Story on page 3
Photo by Doug Gibson*

Think about it! *by Gerald Wilgus*

"Michigan is an embarrassing outlier on openness in government . . ."

State Senator Steve Bieda was correct when he made the above statement. In November 2015, The Center for Public Integrity released its State Integrity Investigation in which our Michigan ranked dead last, 50th out of the 50 states. Openness, accountability, and accessible disclosure are so fundamental to good governance that Michigan's lack in these areas must be considered to be antidemocratic. Beyond the matter of how our government works for us all, this situation presents issues for our Democratic Party and its ability to win elections.

First, of the 13 categories studied, Michigan fails in 10 of them, especially in Executive, Legislative and Judicial accountability, as well as State Pension Fund Management. Transparency and accountability within those four categories is nil. Weak or nonexistent governmental disclosure laws combined with a lack of enforcement authority allows poor governance to thrive,

while lack of transparency in pension fund management pension fund has only one outcome, the lack of fiduciary responsibility to properly manage member's pensions.

We need to remind ourselves of the antidemocratic environment of Michigan's government:

- Ignorant Emergency Managers are unaccountable to their communities. These are bottom-line bean counters who put communities at risk through such actions as delivering drinking water that exceeds the allowable lead level even of industrial wastewater.
- The pay-to-play corruption of lobbyist contributions and gifts to legislators who are not required to disclose those who pay for influence.
- The nondemocratic exemption from the Freedom of Information Act that our legislators and the governor's office have voted for themselves.
- The dark money with no transparency allowed to interfere with elections, including judicial elections for Michigan's Supreme Court.
- A toothless state Ethics Board.

continued on page 2

Think about it *continued from page 1*

- Cronyism and favoritism as accepted practices in the legislature, the judiciary and the governor's office. This has resulted in top departmental officials being influenced to set aside the public's interest. This easy to see to see in departments like the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), which treats corporations as customers, not regulated entities, and acts as an apologist when corporate abuse surfaces.

All of all this is corruption in plain sight is a feature, and not a bug, within our political system. And, to be blunt, lack of transparency and accountability is a tool to disenfranchise people's involvement with our government, because the only voices that are acted upon are those backed by money. This fuels the perception by lower-income voters that there is no difference between political parties, so they fail to show up to vote [Leighley and Nagler, "Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States"].

One of the positive aspects of more open government is that when voters gain more information and trust government they shift to support more liberal policies and parties. In the current system, and with policies in place that eliminate accountability and openness, lack of trust in government presents us with the fact that low-income and middle-income voters don't realize that conservatives are fleecing them. This offers both an opportunity and a problem for Democrats.

The opportunity is that openness and accountability can eventually lead to engaged voters with more information who will see the differences between Democrat and Republican governance and will vote that difference. How to do it?

- **Rescind** PA 4, the emergency manager act, and limit the authority of these managers to fiscal matters that requires the approval of local political authority to execute.

- **Require** full disclosure from all levels of state government of: campaign donations, gifts from lobbyists, and financial interests in entities with issues before the legislature or the courts. Require recusal for even the appearance of conflicts of interest.

- **Provide**, to enforce this, the Secretary of State as well as the Ethics Board with the legal ability to initiate investigations and recommend legal action. Provide them with subpoena powers.

- **Provide** real and draconian penalties for those in government not complying with full disclosure and recusal.

The Robert's court expressly invited full disclosure

in Citizen's United: let's use it. Full disclosure of all money used for political purposes needs to be required, again, with harsh penalties for any failure to disclose.

- **Require** disclosure of all legislation derived from special interests, such as the legislation provided to conservative politicians by ALEC.

- **Legislate** to afford civil service protection to all top officials of state departments.

- **Roll back privatization** without direct public accountability. Ethically, if we choose to imprison somebody we have the direct responsibility for them: eliminate privatization of all penal functions. Make it impossible for charter schools to be managed by for-profit entities by making their management by local school boards mandatory.

Sounds good? Yes, but there is the problem of this being a long-term strategy that can suffer from incrementalism as right-leaning Democrats continually caution that the perfect is the enemy of the good. To be effective, laws that promote openness and accountability need to be insurmountable and whole. To implement them piecemeal is incrementalism. At the national level, we can judge just how Democratic incrementalism confirmed for the casual voter that without effective change there appears to be no difference between the political parties. Remember 2014?

Embrace incrementalism at the state level and we will be associated in the minds of voters as Republican-lite. "We will hurt you less than Republicans" is not a winning campaign promise. Act like we mean to represent the public's interests.

How to sell the Democratic idea of good governance? We need to recognize that voters are lazy: we can explain our good ideas all we wish, but in the end the simple, emotional, arguments win out, regardless of the underlying truth in the appeals. Yep, the argument against national health care about "death panels" is a crock; the real death panels are the insurance companies, but we had or have no countervailing, simple to express, emotional argument, or didn't use it.

Another example: Republicans ARE fleecing low and middle income earners. Nobody likes to feel like a chump, and openness and accountability are payback. But, regardless of how we play the issue, it is important to our long-term success that we promote open and accountable governance as a defining difference between the parties and demonstrate the Democratic governance is capable of improving the lives of Michigan's citizens.

All the Way to the Bottom *by Benzie Dems Vice-chair Mike Ross*

On Tuesday, January 19, I drove to Lansing to join a protest planned by the activist group, Progress Michigan, to bring attention to the governor's mis-handling of the Flint water crisis. Riding with me were Benzie County residents, Peg Case, Mary Scholl, and Doug Gibson. We enjoyed the trip, talking, laughing, and getting to better know each other, but ultimately we were there to bear witness to the utter failure and mind-numbing indifference of our state government in the face of tragedy. As the horrifying sequence of events continues to unfold, the profit model of the Snyder administration and its Emergency Managers becomes clear: failure to provide the most basic of human needs—clean, fresh water, to the people of Flint. The bottom line is the poisoning of up to 9,000 young children and potential future health issues, including fatal legionnaires disease, for all Flint citizens.

That evening at 7:00 p.m., Governor Snyder was to present the annual State of the State address in the Capitol, so outside we joined an estimated 700 to 1,000 other angry citizens from all over Michigan who showed up to protest the Flint debacle. The crowd, including a small “pitch fork brigade,” spent four hours in the 10 degree weather, speaking out, pounding in rhythm on the locked Capitol doors and windows, and chanting for Snyder's removal and arrest. We were all angry and loud, but the crowd was peaceful and I witnessed no incidents between police and protesters.

The evening grew dark and the temperature dropped; the governor's speech began. While we were protesting, Snyder was apologizing. We learned later that he apologized profusely during the speech—for other people. He blamed the MDEQ, the EPA, the MDHHS, and even the powerless Flint mayor and city council, but held key members of his administration virtually blameless. Even state-appointed Emergency Manager, Darnell Earley, escaped criticism, despite arguing that drawing water from the Flint River would save the city 5 million dollars over two years.

Stressing his own innocence, Snyder played the old “buck stops here” card, and promised to stay the course to fix this problem. It boggles the mind that this cliché, reportedly, drew a standing ovation from the partisan crowd invited to Snyder's address. I shake my head.

The estimated cost to completely replace Flint's water infrastructure is \$1.5 billion, \$85 million of which has already been pledged by President Obama from federal emergency funds. Way to save a buck, Snyder.

But these costs don't begin to compensate for the



Photo by Mike Ross

human losses that cannot be quantified on a balance sheet. The residents of Flint face lifetimes of physical and cognitive disabilities that are beyond reckoning at this point, or perhaps ever. How are you going to fix that, Mr. Snyder?

The Snyder administration has foisted Emergency Managers on every black city in Michigan, denying the citizens their democratic rights. Furthermore, as Rick Snyder and the Republican legislature took it upon themselves to overturn the will of the people of Michigan who legally repealed the Emergency Manager law, they showed their contempt for all of us, for our laws, and for our state.

We Democrats have worked hard to turn this runaway train around through petitions to rescind the Emergency Manager Law and to ban the destruction to our environment caused by fracking, only to have laws changed and appropriations tacked on to make bills “referendum-proof.” We have attended forums to keep dark money out of politics and fought against the dismantling of our system of public education in the name of corporate, for-profit schools. Finally, in the sixth year of Snyder's tenure, Michigan has fallen all the way to the bottom in the nation on questions of government transparency.

Many of you have personally fought in these battles, and there is still no easy victory in sight. But we must continue.

We must assure that we elect representatives that won't see Michigan as their private fiefdom. We must elect people that will truly represent the interests of the citizens of our great state.

continued on page 4

All the way *continued from page 3*

We must find excellent local candidates for the Benzie County Commission, and for the open offices of prosecutor, clerk, treasurer and sheriff. Benzonia Township must reelect incumbent Cory Carland. We already have excellent choices for the 101st District House seat in Dan Scripps and Tom Stobie. In the 1st US House race, Jerry Cannon and Lon Johnson are Democratic candidates on the ticket.

We must elect these candidates by working harder and smarter and by volunteering even before being asked. Ultimately, I'm asking each of you to do three things:

- 1.) **VISIT** our Facebook page and our soon-to-be-revamped website to join the local party, volunteer, and for updates and information;
- 2.) **SUBMIT** names of possible qualified candidates for township or county office and consider running yourself; and
- 3.) **VOTE** in all elections and bring with you 5 family members, friends, or neighbors, especially youth, who may not vote regularly or have never voted.
- 4.) **VOTE ALL THE WAY TO THE BOTTOM** of the ballot, where you will find the names of candidates for local office. Since our legislators recently banned straight ticket voting, we must take the time to mark every item!

Your personal contact is invaluable in increasing our local Democratic voter turnout. Thanks for your efforts and on to victory in 2016!

Local candidates vital

County and Township candidates interested in running for elected office must file with the Benzie County Clerk by **Tuesday April 19, 2016**. If you have thought about running for local office, please call our office and we can offer support and guidance. Precinct Delegates must have an affidavit into the County Clerk by Tuesday May 3, 2016.

The Democrats currently have two people running for County Commissioner: Tim Bannister of Frankfort, District 3, City of Frankfort and Crystal Lake Township and incumbent commissioner Coury Carland of District 4, Benzonia Township.

Jason Barnard, currently a Benzonia Township trustee, is running for township supervisor, hoping to replace Democrat Jim Sheets, who is retiring. Incumbent Mandy Gray-Rineer is running again for Almira Township Treasurer. More candidates needed.

Volunteers staff office

Thanks to Dick Robb and the volunteers working with him, we now have a regular schedule for having our headquarters open:

Benzie Democrats Headquarters Hours

Winter/Spring 2016 (January thru April 2016)

Tuesday, noon - 4 p.m.

Wednesday, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Thursday, 4 - 7 p.m.

Saturday, 9 a.m. - noon

Phone: 231-227-1112

Street Address: 9330 Honor Hwy. (US-31); office is east of the Cherry Bowl Drive-in.

Fund raising & ActBlue

We are trying to limit the number of fund raising events in 2016 by moving our members towards making a monthly commitment to the Benzie Democratic Party by the use of Internet Democratic funding website **ActBlue**.

With the approval of the Executive Board, the fund-raising committee has eliminated the yard sale and chicken barbecue, and will return to a biannual Honoree Dinner. The changes greatly reduce the number of volunteer hours required each year—hours that have often been fulfilled by the same people. The plan is to organize social activities that will forge new friendships and don't require expensive tickets to attend. Current fundraising committee co-chairs are Diane Wilbur and Judy Baker.

We know that a monthly donation may be easier for people on a fixed income, although you can also donate on a one-time basis. Any donation made on **ActBlue** will automatically give you a one-year membership in the our local party.

You can set up a monthly or annual contribution from our website (benziedemocrats.com) or at the **ActBlue** website. The DONATE button is now on every page of the Benzie Dems website with a link to ActBlue.

If you have any difficulty or do not have a computer, please call us. You can call Diane Wilbur at 231-944-2666 and leave a message. Someone will return your call and give assistance.

"American Revolutionary"

will be shown at the Garden Theater in Frankfort on **May 18** to benefit our local party. There will be pre-show refreshments at 6 p.m., followed by the movie.

GRASS ROOTS: become a precinct delegate in 2016

Screaming at your TV set? Run for precinct delegate and be a part of the political solution!

What is a precinct?

The precinct is the smallest political unit in the country and all voters in a precinct vote at one location. The precinct is where elections are won and lost. It's your neighborhood. You know the people and you know what issues are important to them. Benzie County has 13 precincts. Each precinct can have at least one delegate.

We need your help. It's all about making friends and building relationships.

What is a Precinct Delegate?

In each precinct, delegates are elected directly by precinct voters to serve as a bridge between voters and the Democratic Party. They represent their neighborhood's interests at Democratic Party meetings, and active precinct delegates provide leadership that wins elections for the Democratic Party.

What is the first official duty of a Precinct Delegate?

After the primary, those elected will be notified officially by the county clerk by mail. The notification will include the time and place of our county Democratic convention, which will be held in August after the primary. The delegates are responsible for convening in the convention to elect the executive committee and officers to serve through the next general election.

What else do Precinct Delegates do?

- Help Democrats get registered to vote.
- Take information on issues and candidates to precinct voters.
- Identify other Democrats, and recruit new party members.
- Help turn out the Democratic vote in the precinct on election day.
- Keep Democratic leaders informed about the issues that concern voters.

You can make calls, knock on doors or mail

information. You can have precinct get togethers. Whatever works best for you to stay in touch with your precinct.

How do Precinct Delegates get elected?

Precinct delegates are elected in the Democratic primary every two years in August. Only Democratic voters choose Democratic precinct delegates. These are mostly uncontested races, so it can take as little as one vote to win.

Each precinct is allotted a number of precinct delegates based on past Democratic voting strength. **We now have 20 elected delegates, but based on Democratic voting are allowed to fill roughly 60 spots**, so many candidates are needed.

Precinct delegate candidates file an 'Affidavit of Identity-Precinct Delegate' (http://michigan.gov/documents/Af-ID_Precnt_139901_7.pdf) to get on the ballot. Your Affidavit of Identity must be notarized.

Candidates for precinct delegate must file their Affidavit of Identity form with their county clerk. The filing deadline is **May 3, 2016**. A Notary will be at party Executive Board meetings, **March 19** and **April 16** at 10 a.m. for your convenience.

Checklist to Become a Precinct Delegate

1. Obtain a precinct map from the county, city or township clerk's office.
2. File your **notarized** Affidavit of Identity with your county, city or township clerk no later than 4 p.m. on **May 3, 2016**. Primary election day is **August 2, 2016**. Remember to vote.
3. Get involved in your local Democratic Party immediately. Go to meetings. Keep the Party informed about what your neighbors are talking about and keep your neighbors informed about what elected Democrats are doing for them.

The Democratic Party is here to help. Let us know if you need information or assistance. By working together, we can deliver Michigan for the Democratic ticket. Call Bob McQuilkin, precinct organizer at 231-383-1206 or email, rmcquilkin@charter.net.

Clinton or Sanders? Vote March 8

Remember to participate in Michigan's **Presidential Primary Election**, either in person or via absentee ballot. As of Monday January 25, Absentee Ballot Applications are available at the Benzie County Clerk's Office or your Township Clerk's office. If you

are 60 years or older, unable to vote without assistance, expecting to be out of town on election day or if you will be working the polls you are eligible to vote through Absentee Ballot.

Calendar

Feb. 20: Regular meeting.

March 8: Presidential Primary

Mar. 19 : Regular meeting

Apr. 16 : Regular meeting

Apr. 19 : Filing deadline for local candidates.

May 3 : Filing deadline for precinct delegates.

May 18 : "American Revolutionary" Garden Theater, Frankfort

May 21 : Regular meeting

Jun. 18 : Regular Meeting

Regular meetings begin at 10 a.m. on the 3rd Saturday of the month at our headquarters on U.S. 31 in Honor unless otherwise announced. No meetings in July and December.

What's your opinion?

We need volunteers to submit Letters-to-the-Editor to local newspapers. Submit letters independently, or contact Mike Ross at (231) 651-0604 or at mike.ross0919@gmail.com for more information.

If you use electronic communications, please request "E-Kicker only" by e-mailing Mary Scholl: mascholl12@icloud.com. Put "Benzie Dems Contact Update" in the subject line of your email. The newsletter is also available at our website, where you can download it and print out if desired.

The Kicker is published and paid for by the Benzie County Democratic Party and is not authorized by any candidate or candidate committee. Editor: Doreen Fitzgerald (231-352-7876)

Voter Registration

The last day to register to vote in the March 8 Presidential Primary Election is Monday **February 8**. You can register to vote at the Michigan Secretary of State office or at your Township Clerk's Office. If you are not sure where your Township Office is please call the Benzie County Democratic Headquarters 231-227-1112 or look up your township on the Internet.

If you, a family member or friend misses this deadline, get registered now for the general primary in August and the November election.

Leadership search is on

The resignations last fall of chair Marcia Stobie and secretary Delores Berta mean we need two new officers. Stobie resigned due to her husband Tom's campaign for state representative; Berta resigned for personal reasons.

In the interim, the executive board in January elected Ray Nichols first vice-chair to carry out the chair's duties. Ray has been busy planning and organizing what we need to accomplish during this campaign year.

If you are interested in serving out either of these terms (through 2016) or can suggest someone who might serve, contact either Ray Nichols or Mike Ross (contact information below).

Benzie Dems Officers

Chair (vacant)

First Vice Chair, Ray Nichols: (231) 383-1305, raynick@charter.net

Vice Chair, Mike Ross: (231) 651-0604, mike.ross0919@gmail.com

Treas., Bruce Ogilvie: (231)-352-6263, glengerrick@gmail.com

Secretary (vacant)

Advocates for Benzie formed

A group of concerned Benzie citizens, known as Advocates for Benzie County, is sponsoring a series of discussions on topics related to "Building a Better Benzie."

The subject of the first meeting will be: **Housing Needs in Benzie County**: affordable housing; housing for workers, full-time residents, part-time residents, and seniors. It takes place Saturday February 20, 1 p.m. at the Benzie Dems Headquarters, which is on loan for this purpose. Coffee and cookies will be provided.

The location of the discussions that follow will be announced later. The second discussion is March 24 at 6:30 p.m., **Solutions for Housings Needs**. Pizza and pop will be provided. On Saturday, April 16, 1 p.m., the topic will be **Infrastructure Needs**.

The date, time, topic and location of the May discussion are yet to be determined and also will be announced at a later date. For more information address inquiries to: Advocates for Benzie County, PO Box 1096, Frankfort, MI 49635, (231) 352-9060.