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By [Chad Selwesi](#), The Macomb Daily

Posted: 07/26/14, 4:23 PM EDT

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Voters heading to the polls on Aug. 5 for the primary election are in for a shock.

Where have all the candidates gone?

All across the county, incumbents are running unopposed and few races among the challengers are contested. These are not elections. These are coronations.

For a mix of reasons, fewer and fewer people are willing to run for office, particularly women. That means the political parties have increasing difficulty recruiting candidates. And that means the voters don't have much to choose from.

The quandary this year starts at the top of the ballot. Rick Snyder and Mark Schauer running unopposed in the gubernatorial primary. Gary Peters and Terri Lynn Land getting a free ride in the primaries for an open U.S. Senate seat. When was the last time that happened?

Further down the ballot the story is the same. In Macomb County, little or no competition is offered for Congress, state Senate, state House and the county Board of Commissioners.

How bad is it? If you are a Democrat living in St. Clair Shores or Macomb Township, the ballot offers not one contested race. The same is true for Democrats in Chesterfield Township, Shelby Township, the southern half of Sterling Heights and much of Clinton Township.

On the Republican primary ballots, the three candidates running for the GOP county executive nomination—David Novak, Randell Shafer and Erin Stahl—comprise the one key contest. Beyond that, most Republican candidates will win their race by default.

In fact, no Republican election in the entire county for state Senate, state House or county board consists of more than two candidates.

The political pros who manage campaigns explain that running for office has become much more expensive, and candidates must be willing and able to take time off work (in some cases, several weeks) for exhausting days knocking on voters' doors. For many, the prospect of seeking election for commissioner became less attractive when county board districts doubled in size in 2010.

If you throw your hat into the ring, expect it to get stomped. Chances are quite good that during the months of campaigning, a candidate will experience harsh criticism—or worse—from voters, from opponents, and especially from the opponents' supporters and volunteers.

Beyond that, the legislative districts are now gerrymandered so thoroughly that many races are considered futile, unless a potential candidate wants to challenge an incumbent in a primary.

Term limits also loom as a major factor in races for the state Legislature. The mindset of many who brush aside attempts to convince them to run is, "Why should I take on an incumbent when, in four years, there will be an open seat?"

One final factor that has led to this skewed version of democracy is the growing public disdain for politics and the way lawmakers, especially those in Congress, are held in such low regard.

Some who might have run for office 10 or 20 years ago now see politics as a dirty business without any rewards. They observe the hyper-partisanship in Lansing and Washington and want no part of it.

New research suggests that this dilemma will only get worse, as the Millennial generation is particularly disinterested in a career in politics. Even if it's just for one day.

The Bipartisan Policy Center recently reported that a survey of college students revealed this: If the students were given a choice of professions, just for a day, all at the same pay – mayor, business owner, teacher or salesperson – only 10 percent would choose mayor.

The BPC report also found that the number of Americans who have served on a school board has dropped by 90 percent compared to 1932.

That certainly rings true in Macomb County. After the school board filing deadline passed last Tuesday for the upcoming November elections, four districts came up short – more board seats than candidates to fill them. As a result, board members will be selected in Van Dyke, Armada, Richmond and South Lake based on a small number of write-in votes.

In the Van Dyke (south Warren) district, two spots are on the ballot, including an open seat. Yet, only one candidate, incumbent Steven Nielson, filed for office.

An identical situation arose in 2011 when four county districts could not round up enough contestants for a true competition.

This year, the list of candidates running on the non-partisan portion of the November ballot shows that in seven districts those who filed are all running unopposed, so the elections there are, in effect, already over.

Across Michigan, political commentators have warned voters for several years that the only way to make their vote count is to cast a ballot in the primary elections.

Because of the gerrymandered district lines, most winners in primaries will breeze to re-election in November. That makes the primary the only game in town.

But now we have a doubly troubling scenario playing out. The only game in town is lacking enough players. It's almost as if the 2014 elections were decided back in April when the filing deadline for partisan offices arrived.

Just as Little League baseball teams in days gone by would sometimes forfeit a game due to a lack of players, voters, through no fault of their own, are forfeiting their right to choose candidates to represent them in office.

If there is no selection, is it really an election?

About the Author



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ME - The Original • 6 days ago

The Chadster is either woefully ignorant, or he's just hoping that MD readers are incredibly stupid regarding the real answer here.

THE main reason that there is a "lack" of candidates is that the media (The Macomb Daily included), have already taken it upon themselves to decide who and who isn't worthy of attention during an election.

Good candidates (especially those without family connections) and those with new ideas on how to solve problems are shut out of the process by a newspaper that is afraid of offending influential people in the community.

Exhibit "A", remember when The Macomb Daily used to publish a list of politicians who owed campaign fines to the county right on their front page?

Anyone want to take a wild guess why the MD discontinued that practice?

You reap what you sow.

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AL • 6 days ago

why are not more women running? WOW read your own paper to find out that one.....Liberal's war on women already attacking Land for being successful.....

2 | • Reply • Share



29 • 5 days ago

AL should throw his hat into the ring for something. I would vote for him!

1 | • Reply • Share



frankcusumano • 3 days ago

Chad article has omitted the two notable exceptions to his narrative. The 36th state house representative seat is hotly contested between the GOP establishment candidate (30 years plus) Stan Grot and new comer Pete Lucido. There are also 12 candidates vying for 3 spots on the Macomb Community College Board of Trustees (unpaid 6 year term). That race is "further down the ballot." The College has an annual budget of \$135 million dollars a year and the Board of Trustees is the public's voice in how those monies are raised (county-wide operating millage and tuition) and spent. Unfortunately, too often, tuition is increased on students, and then pay raises are generously distributed all around to the unions on the students' dime. Don't get me wrong, these unionized employees are hard working and appreciated employees, however, citizens of our county are still hurting, severely, from the recession and rubber stamping the administration's tuition increase - pay increase proposals is not the role of a Trustee. I voted against each tuition increase since taking office. By the way, the administration also gets pay raises all around, including the President of the College. This is called "collegiality" at the College, but it seems more like a "honey pot."

As an incumbent Trustee, I proposed that the Board of Trustee packets be made available online to the public before the Board meetings. Those packets are delivered to the union bosses before our Board of Trustee meetings. It is in their contracts. It seemed only fair that the taxpayers have this same information, and I argued would counter the perception that the College had become the hand maiden on the unions at the College. The "Trustee Cusumano Transparency Proposal" was defeated on February 18, 2014. This vote

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