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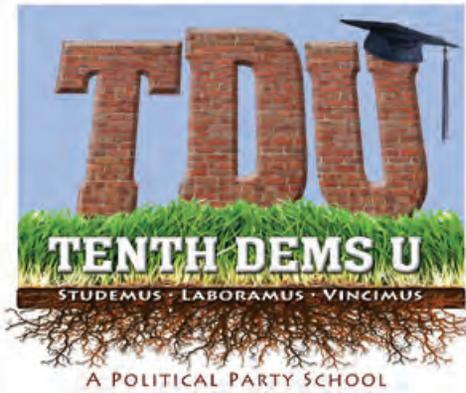
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*The opinions expressed are those of the writers, and not necessarily endorsed by Tenth Dems*

## So, What Exactly Is Tenth Dems University?



*by Adrienne Kirshbaum*

Thomas Jefferson, who was not a member of Tenth Dems, famously said, “Democracy demands an educated and informed electorate.”

We agree, which is why we established Tenth Dems University. Our goal was to educate and inform citizens in the 10th Congressional District.

To achieve that goal, we scheduled “meet ‘n greets” that allowed voters to hear the candidates who would appear on their ballots, and pre-primary debates so they could compare these candidates and choose the one that best expressed their views. We found experts in a variety of fields and brought them to our district to participate in panel discussions on subjects as diverse as redistricting, religion in politics, and gun control. We proudly presented well-known media figures like Neil Steinberg of the *Chicago Sun-Times* and Thom Hartmann of MSNBC. We booked humorist Aaron Freeman to lead a workshop on political satire.

Tenth Dems University has no pom pom girls, no football team, no chemistry labs. But it has provided residents of the 10th District and beyond a series of interesting and entertaining sessions on politics and government, and it continues to do so. We think Thomas Jefferson would approve. **TD**



# Tenth News

[www.tenthdems.org](http://www.tenthdems.org)

DECEMBER 2013 Illinois Tenth Congressional District Democrats Newsletter Volume 10, Edition 12

## Panel Educates About Multi-Front Assaults on Fair Elections

*by Sharon Sanders*

These are not the best of times in America. Unfortunately, many in our country have put the almighty dollar before everything else. In fact, actors like the Koch Brothers have been trying to buy our elected representatives, to make our legislators beholden to moneyed interests and not voters. One strategy to accomplish this end is to deter students, women, persons of color, hourly wage-earners, and seniors—that is, members of demographic groups that tend to vote Democratic—from voting at all.

On November 6, at the Glenview Public Library, the Tenth Dems and the Coalition to Overturn Citizens United jointly sponsored a panel discussion on just this topic, focusing on the risks of unfair elections, the costs of gerrymandering, the infusion of big money into campaigns, and techniques for voter suppression.

Our excellent panel consisted of Melissa Urda of the Illinois Ballot Integrity Project, David Melton of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, Benjamin Singer of Common Cause, and Lauren Beth Gash, a former vice chair of the Illinois House of Representatives’ Campaign and Election Reform Committee.



Each panelist’s presentation focused on the efforts of the speaker’s organization to ensure fair elections. All gave thoughtful, informative presentations. Tenth Dems’ Laura Tomsy moderated.

Urda gave some historical perspective on the changes in voting methods that have taken place in the last decade, with particular attention to electronic voting machines that do not create a

*continued on page 3*

*Why don’t Republicans want Americans to have affordable health insurance? See page 7 for insight.*



*Benjamin Singer, Melissa Urda, and Lauren Beth Gash listen attentively to fellow panelist David Melton.*

## Election Reform Requires Two-Front War

*by David Melton*

In the business of trying to form a more perfect union, we are always obliged to fight a two-front war.

The first front is essentially defensive—defending the gains we have been able to make over the years. One of the things the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform (ICPR) is currently doing on that front is assisting the Illinois Attorney General’s office in defending the constitutionality of the state’s campaign finance limits that were finally adopted in December 2009, exactly one year after Rod Blagojevich’s arrest. A right wing PAC and its supporters filed a lawsuit in 2012, shortly before the election, seeking a declaration that the limits are unconstitutional on the theory that, under the First Amendment, anyone should be able to give as much money as desired to any political candidate. (This is part of a nationwide attack on campaign finance limits by big money interests, now that they have what they believe is a receptive five-member majority on the U.S. Supreme Court.) In cooperation with the Campaign Legal Center and the Chicago Council of Lawyers, ICPR has prepared and submitted several amicus briefs arguing that the limits adopted by the legislature are not only wise but also are plainly consti-

tutional. The federal trial and appellate courts have thus far agreed, denying a request for a preliminary injunction last year. Later this month the trial court is expected to rule on our side’s request to have the lawsuit dismissed.



Unfortunately, bad news continues to come from the U.S. Supreme Court. Last month that Court heard oral argument in a case in which big money interests are challenging the constitutionality of the federal aggregate limit on contributors in any one election cycle. Among other things, that limit prevents individual contributors from giving a total of approximately no more than \$125,000 to all congressional candidates in any one election cycle. (How unfair!) The betting is that the Court is likely to strike down that limit when it issues a ruling, probably next spring.

On the defensive front, ICPR is also working to force compliance with the minimal disclosure requirements that apply to SuperPACs in Illinois and is cooperating with other groups to oppose efforts at voter suppression. These include participating in discussions of how best to respond to the Supreme Court’s June 2013 decision striking down the preclearance remedy in the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 and how to resist and oppose efforts to restrict voting access or

*continued on page 4*

# Let's Build a Real People's Movement—Right Now

by Benjamin Singer

On November 6 in Glenview, experts from Tenth Dems, Common Cause Illinois, Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, and the Illinois Ballot Integrity Project discussed how money, gerrymandering, voting irregularities, and corruption are ruling the land.



Activist Benjamin Singer

What's an activist to do?

The answer, as I proposed: work smarter, not harder.

It can be easy to get distracted by political crises, from the shutdown to sequestration to the Trans Pacific Partnership.

But these are happening because of fundamental problems in our democracy.

For example (believe it or not), Tea Party members of Congress are not the problem, but a symptom. With districts gerrymandered in certain areas to guarantee Republicans victory—and

let's be honest, this also happens in blue states—the party primary matters more than the general election.

So do you really expect a GOP congressman—or congresswoman—to compromise with the Democrats, when compromise will guarantee loss of the seat in the next election? These members are representing their constituents—but hand-picked constituents. Voters should select their public officials, not the other way around.

What about sequestration? If food stamp recipients were people who gave \$100,000 per election campaign, do you think food stamps would be hit by budget cuts? The undue influence of moneyed interests, whether super-wealthy people or corporations, means that our public policy always “leans toward the green.”

Do you want to see these problems come to an end? That takes a cohesive people's movement, one that can gain the collective power necessary to force change.

Get involved in an organization dedicated to fixing these fundamental issues. Build the organization until it has the power it needs to push real progress. And change the world. **TD**

## Assault on Elections *continued from page 1*



Tenth Dems Leader Sharon Sanders organized the event.

paper tally. She showed an appalled audience how easily such machines can be hacked, and how the manipulation of a fairly small number of votes can reverse the results of an election. Her organization advocates for legislative standards for voting technology that will ensure that all votes are counted—and counted correctly.

Melton spoke about voter suppression methods, including new state laws requiring

specific modes of identification to be displayed before voting that are difficult for many poor and minority voters to obtain. Other voter suppression techniques include scheduling fewer early voting days with shorter hours, designating polling places

that are scattered and harder to reach, abolishing same-day registration, permitting more third-party challenges to voters at the polls (sanctioned harassment), and other procedures that ensure longer and longer lines on election day. Votes are also manipulated by gerrymandering districts.

Melton concluded his presentation by suggesting some actions that could counter these assaults on voting rights.

Passing laws allowing same-day registration would eliminate problems with voters being dropped from the roles in error and being disenfranchised. Redistricting reform plans that would take the process out of the hands of partisan legislatures and



Tenth Dems Leader Laura Tomsky introduces panelists.

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Above left: Benjamin Singer, Lauren Beth Gash and Laura Tomsky; center: David Melton; right: audience members listen with concern as panelists outline challenges.

## Election Reform *continued from page 2*

make registration more difficult.

On the offensive front of actually trying to improve the existing system, ICPR keeps in contact with the State Board of Elections regarding interpretations of the relatively new campaign finance limits legislation as well as the older disclose requirements; works with other groups such as Change IL supporting their redistricting education effort and with other groups in educating the public or seeking reforms and improvements to the existing registration systems; supports efforts aimed at improving disclose requirements in Illinois for candidates, PACs, and lobbyists; and advocates for adoption of measures to publicly finance elections—especially judicial elections.

We still have plenty of room for improvement in our nation and our state. To learn more about ICPR's work, you can visit [www.Ilcampaign.org](http://www.Ilcampaign.org). **TD**



## Assault on Elections *continued from page 3*

have it done by independent, bipartisan commissions would bolster voters' power to demand accountability from their representatives. Requiring tax-exempt entities that, since the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, can contribute vast sums to candidates to disclose their membership would lessen the corrupting influence of big money on our elections.

Singer agreed that public financing of campaigns, coupled with campaign finance reform, is one of the most important steps toward fairer elections. Public financing of campaigns would change the source of the money from special interests to the general public. In response, Melton suggested that since much of the public is uneasy about judges running election campaigns at all, a good place to start would be to propose public financing of judicial elections only.

Following their presentation, all three panelists took questions from the highly engaged audience. Unfortunately, apathy and disillusionment among the general public exacerbate the problems with our electoral system. People who are tired of nothing getting done in politics and of the polarization and unwillingness to compromise may react by deciding that it's not worth the effort to vote.

The panel's exploration of these issues reminded us that we, as a society, must fight back. The answer is to make sure everyone votes and then tells our politicians that they represent us and not the moneyed interests. Forums like this not only inform; they also remind us that we, the people, have the power—we just need to use it. **TD**

*Susan MacDonald contributed to this article*



# Tenth Dems Participates in High School Campaign Fair



by Joe Adler

On Tuesday evening, November 5, at Stevenson High School's Recital Theater, Tenth Dems made a 10-minute presentation about how student activists can get involved in their community. The effect of those 10 minutes surely will resonate far longer.

The event was part of the school's civics program, in partnership with the Mikva Challenge, a nonpartisan organization that prioritizes the development of civic leadership for Chicago area high school youth. Attendees included students from five different high schools (Carmel, Mundelein, Buffalo Grove, Stevenson, and Maine East.). Stevenson teachers Andy Conneen and Dan Larsen oversaw the event.

Organizers placed tables on opposite sides of the theater lobby, one for Democrats and one for Republicans. Tenth Dems was well-represented by Joe Adler, Lauren Beth Gash, Pat Lind, Steve Rosenzweig, and interns Dana Abelson and Robert Luna.

Students started coming in around 6:30. A large crowd milled around the Tenth Dems table. Students asked questions, shared stories, and expressed much interest in learning who we are, what we do, and where and how one signs up to help. By the time the formal program got underway, more than 25 of the students had signed up to volunteer and to pursue possible internships.

At 7:00, all of the participating organizations were invited into the theater, one at a time, to make their 10-minute presentations. During the first hour, staff for candidates for governor spoke, followed by staff for U.S. Representative Brad Schneider and former U.S. Representative Bob Dold, who has announced that he plans to run against Schneider in 2014. Young Republicans also were represented.

Tenth Dems spoke last.

Tenth Dems Chair Lauren Beth Gash spoke about her background and experience, how the Tenth Dems came to be, our mission, and "how it all gets done."

Next, intern Dana Abelson told the group why, as a sophomore at Highland Park High School, she chose to be a Democrat. Dana explained, "...I think everyone should have the right to love who they want to love, make decisions about their body and health, and be given the opportunity to live in a safe, gun-free place."

She added, "[W]e are the future of the country because we will be running it someday. We can not be ignorant to what's going on right now. If we get involved and become aware it will secure a better future for everyone."

Robert Luna followed, telling the audience about his two summers (2010 and 2011) as a Tenth Dems Intern. The audience took in every word, listening intently. It was clear that many were intrigued and wanted to hear more.

Robert talked about being at a reception with Pat Quinn and how the experience could "get to be personal." Robert met the Governor's mother and brother as he was helping out at Quinn's birthday celebration.

As a Tenth Dems intern, Robert got to meet other elected officials, from Illinois and beyond, including Rep. Brad Schneider, then state Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias, state Attorney General Lisa Madigan, then state Rep. Karen May, then State Sen. Susan Garrett, State Rep. Elaine Nekritz, Sen. Mark Begich (Alaska), and many others.

Robert further elaborated that, in addition to helping out at events with elected officials and candidates, the basics of internships include office work and legwork--everything from stuffing envelopes to canvassing, walking in parades, and even public speaking.

And a Tenth Dems internship influences interns' lives well after the term ends. Even though it's been two years since Robert served, he remains in contact with Tenth Dems and other Democratic organizations. In the summer of 2012, he took advantage of the opportunity to do a commercial for Chris Kennedy, candidate for Lake County State's Attorney. "It was real, make-up, director, and all," Robert remarked.

Robert also pointed out that "being a Tenth Dems intern helps with connections and expanding your network." He explained that the Chair also furnished assistance "with job searches and recommendations," which definitely "helps a whole lot."

The evening ended with a pizza and cake reception and wonderfully promising long-lasting contacts. **TD**

A review of votesmart.org records over the last few months has made one thing clear. We in the Illinois 10th Congressional District need Brad Schneider!

We need Brad because he is representing the 10th District diligently and capably. Although often in the minority, Brad has steadily voted against bills that cause progressives to blanch, while striving to pass the laws we want. We know where Brad's announced 2014 opponent stands. There are a lot of crazies in the House of Representatives, and we certainly don't need any more.

Bills brought to the floor in the Republican House since May 2013 have dealt with a range of issues, including government funding, immigration, gay rights, student loans, food stamps, and the environment.

During the government shutdown, Brad was one of two Illinois House members to refuse a paycheck while government workers went without theirs. Brad gave his earnings back to the treasury.

On October 31, Brad signed a letter asking John Boehner to take threats of a government shutdown over the debt ceiling off the table. Brad also voted against a bill to limit the President's authority to raise the debt ceiling, but that bill passed 222-191.

Opposed to starving the poor, Brad voted against the Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act, which cuts \$4 billion a year from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps). The Act passed the House with only Republican support. Earlier in the year, Brad voted to restore \$20.5 billion to the food stamp program, but that failed to pass the House.

On environmental matters, Brad offered two successful amendments strengthening protections for the Great Lakes. One measure called for a coordinated national strategy to deal with the invasive Asian carp. The other sought to reduce the Army Corps of Engineers infrastructure project backlog so that it can move on pending projects, including 23 in the 10th District. Brad has also offered measures to protect the Great Lakes from oil and gas drilling.

In May 2013, Brad voted to repeal a requirement that all Keystone XL Pipeline permits be approved within 90 days. Brad also voted for a requirement that the pipeline be assessed for vulnerability to terrorist attack. And he supported a measure requiring tar sands producers to fully offset their greenhouse gas emissions. All three measures failed in the Republican-held House (182-234, 176-239, 146-269 respectively).

Brad voted against authorizing the mining of "national strate-



gic and critical" minerals, while limiting the permit processing time to 30 days and the time to bring civil action regarding mineral exploration of a mine to 60 days. Instead, he voted to require mine operators to include the cost of clean-up in their insurance. The mining bill passed (246-178). The clean-up amendment failed (191-235).

Brad also voted against the inaptly named "Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act," which in fact required identifying parts of the national forest for commercial logging. The bill passed the Republican-controlled House 244-173.

An unwavering supporter of individual rights, Brad is a cosponsor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would bar employment discrimination against gays. ENDA passed in the Senate, but Republican Speaker John Boehner is currently refusing to bring it up for a vote in the House.

An advocate for access to college, Brad cosponsored the Student Loan Relief Act, which would have extended the current 3.4 percent interest rate on Federal Stafford Loans. Brad voted against the inaptly named House version of the bill, the Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act, which would have allowed rates to vary over the life of the loan, which meant rates could climb to more than eight percent.

On immigration reform, Brad voted against an amendment barring the use of funds to enforce certain immigration-related memos that prioritized deporting terrorist and gang members over children. The amendment nevertheless passed 224-201.

We need to make sure that Brad is returned to Congress in 2014, and all Democrats need to focus on capturing a majority of the House. Until we can, the crazies will continue to outvote us. **TD**

# Why Don't Republicans Want Americans to Have Affordable Health Insurance?

by Mark Rosenberg, M.D.

The Republicans have done all they can to sabotage efforts to implement the Affordable Care Act (ACA, aka Obamacare), even though it is the law of the land. Then they claim that the same law (whose framework was developed in a Republican think tank decades ago) is unworkable and that the fault lies entirely with the Obama administration. And they rail against a “government takeover of healthcare,” even though Obamacare depends on private insurance companies as the healthcare exchange providers.

The 43 attempts in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives to repeal the Affordable Care Act are well-known, but they're only one small part of the story. In the states and in the courts, as well as in Congress, the Republican Party has done everything possible to derail the law and to thwart its primary goal of expanding access to healthcare for millions of Americans who, up until now, have been unable to afford insurance. And although the President has accepted full responsibility for the disastrous performance of the healthcare.gov website, it's important to understand that the Republicans' multi-front assault on Obamacare and its implementation is also to blame.

As soon as the President signed the ACA into law, Republicans launched multiple legal challenges. These diverted resources from implementation of the law as states and insurers waited to learn which provisions would survive a Supreme Court ruling.

Although the Supreme Court ultimately upheld the constitutionality of the ACA's individual mandate, the decision pushed Obamacare slightly off track, both because its pendency diverted resources from implementation of and education about the law and because the Court did alter the law in one respect.

As enacted, the law required states to make Medicaid available to individuals earning up to 133 percent of the federally-defined poverty level. But the Court forbade Congress from requiring the states to expand their Medicaid programs, and dozens of Republican governors seized on this ruling to refuse to do so, leaving tens of thousands of their poorest citizens without access to affordable healthcare.

Since the Medicaid expansion is funded 100 percent by the federal government for the first three years, the opt-out does not save these states' taxpayers any money. To the contrary, the denial of Medicaid to the most impoverished residents of these states will place an added financial burden on hospitals that serve the uninsured, a burden that will undoubtedly be passed on to the insured population, as has been the case since before the ACA.

In their efforts to thwart ACA implementation, Republicans also limited funding of any initiative within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to implement or promote

Obamacare, even attempting to prevent HHS from transferring funds within HHS for these functions. At the same time, Republican governors shifted to HHS the bulk of the burden of implementation of the healthcare exchanges. In 2010, when the law was being debated, many Republican governors told the administration that they wanted to build their own exchanges, but they subsequently reneged on that promise and left the healthcare exchanges to HHS to administer.

And the problems with the federal website have been further exacerbated in a number of states with large numbers of uninsured, notably Texas and Florida, where trained Navigators, who are tasked with assisting in enrollment on a nonpartisan basis, have been denied access to the public.

Contrast our Democratically-governed state, where hundreds of Navigators have been certified by the Illinois Department of Insurance to help consumers get through the healthcare.gov website and understand their coverage options. Within the 10th Congressional District, Moraine Township Supervisor Anne Flanigan Bassi has recruited a cadre of volunteer Navigators who are working days, nights, and weekends to help with enrollment in Highland Park, Deerfield, Highwood, and Waukegan.

The Republican intransigence in its opposition to the Affordable Care Act hurts the millions of Americans without affordable, employer-sponsored health insurance. It also has inhibited the public's understanding of many of the benefits of the law, including the right to obtain insurance regardless of preexisting conditions, extension of benefits to young adults on their parents' plans, and the lifting of annual and lifetime caps on coverage. In addition, there are many aspects of Obamacare that few have heard of, which we'll describe in more detail in subsequent issues of this newsletter, especially the quality improvements and coordination of care so important to those with chronic illness.

It is our fervent hope that once the website is functioning smoothly and the public comes to understand all the Affordable Care Act accomplishes, Democrats will welcome the Republicans' determination to make Obamacare the major issue in the 2014 congressional elections. **TD**



# Another Shot in the Foot

by Jack Altschuler

The recent government shutdown over a stupid power play by right-wing extremists, along with their threat to cause the United States to default on its debt, was more than just political theater and more than even a showdown episode. It was an exercise in self-destruction.

Yes, it was destructive to the Republican Party. Of course, the Republicans stopped being true conservatives at least 35 years ago and instead have focused on transferring wealth to the already rich from all the rest of us, ensuring our prisons are full of chronically voiceless people and starting unnecessary wars. So, who really cares if the Republican Party is in self-immolation mode? Just let it burn to the ground and perhaps some sane voices will emerge from the ashes.

The self-destruction you need to pay attention to is that of the United States of America. We have threatened the entire world with financial catastrophe. We have demonstrated repeatedly that our primary goal is national dysfunction. We have marginalized the majority of Americans. We have dramatically expanded the ranks of our poor. We have declared that we don't want to fund the education of our children. And we do want to arrest and torture people without so much as charging them with a crime and then

keep them imprisoned endlessly. All of this stands in stark contrast to the values we say we believe in like truth, justice, democracy, fairness, and opportunity.

Given that contrast, what do you suppose the people in the rest of the world think when they hear the happy words but see the not-so-happy deeds? Surely, our mixed messages pull the rug from under their trust and confidence in us. Don't imagine that is a small thing.

Trust is the cornerstone of relationship, and we are in continuous relationship with a global society. For many decades the standard of world trade has been the American dollar. It is the symbol of global influence, enhanced not just by military might but also by trust and confidence in our values and our dependability. Once those things are gone, the money of some other country will step in and be the global standard and the United States will be a second-tier country.

We are in a headlong rush to hand over world leadership to China, precipitated with daring forcefulness by crazy, far-right Americans who tell the world that the United States cannot be trusted. They do that by paralyzing our government and threatening creditors with our default; and those exercises are scheduled for a replay in the middle of January. **TD**



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