



Midwest reform network points out cracks in Minnesota political system

Reformers layout plan to repair damage and restore public trust

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ST. PAUL – Leading Midwestern reform groups including TakeAction Minnesota, today released a new book profiling the condition of democracy in Minnesota, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin and Michigan. The findings show that while Minnesota hasn't experienced the high profile corruption that has plagued other states, there are cracks in its foundation that need to be addressed. The analysis also points to a number of negative regional trends that are making their way to Minnesota, including a sharp increase in the politicization of judicial elections and election administration measures that increase voter suppression.

The book, "Democratic Renewal: A Call to Action from America's Heartland," profiles both pathologies in each of the states, as well as recent reforms. Importantly, the volume offers a prescription for renewed government vigor and accountability for each of the states. The book is being issued under the banner of the recently created Midwest Democracy Network (MDN), a nonpartisan alliance of public interest groups dedicated to strengthening democratic institutions and practices. The Minnesota chapter was written by C. Scott Cooper, TakeAction Minnesota Education Fund Director.

"This report shows the reality that Minnesota's democracy is under siege," said Dan McGrath, Executive Director of TakeAction Minnesota. "Especially in an election year, our government needs to take important steps toward expanding access to the polls and easing the way for greater participation. Our hope is that state leaders will heed this call for urgent action so that changes can be made in time for Election Day."

The Minnesota story tells of recent problems, including efforts to suppress voter participation and discourage turnout, the growing influence of money in politics, and the looming threat to judicial independence brought on by partisan involvement in the election of judges.

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Despite the many problems Minnesota faces, there have been recent signs that illustrate that the state's reformist spirit is still strong. Former Vice President Walter Mondale and former Governor Arne Carlson have led an effort to reform the redistricting process, while former Governor Al Quie has fought to safeguard the independence and impartiality of our judiciary. In addition, a diverse coalition of civic groups, including the League of Women Voters, the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and TakeAction Minnesota, have come together to chart a course for political reform in a state that has served as a model of clean and open government.

Recommendations to strengthen and expand democracy in Minnesota include:

- Automatic voter registration, translation of voting materials by the Office of Secretary of State, easier voting procedures for Minnesotans overseas and in the military.
- Improved re-enfranchisement of ex-felons.
- Implementation of a merit selection and retention selection system to ensure judicial independence.
- Implementation of a Fair and Clean Elections (FACE) system that would provide candidates with the option of full public financing and encourage grassroots participation in the political process.
- Mandatory cooling-off periods between lawmaking and lobbying
- Enhanced public disclosure of the economic and financial interests of high-ranking elected and appointed public officials

The MDN, established in late 2006, consists of both state-based reform advocacy organizations and national research and policy institutions. Nearly 30 organizations are affiliated with MDN.

The entire book, "Democratic Renewal: A Call to Action from America's Heartland," along with summaries of the authors' state-specific findings and reform recommendations can be found at www.MidwestDemocracyNetwork.org.

TakeAction Minnesota is a founding member of the Midwest Democracy Network.

TakeAction Minnesota's mission is to unite the power of diverse people, organizations, and communities in active grassroots democracy to bring about social, racial, and economic justice.

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