

IN MI THIS YEAR IT'S ALL ABOUT THE REFERENDA

MI's Supreme Court just ruled that, in spite of the purportedly improper font size used on petitions, the referendum to overturn MI's Emergency Manager law will be on November's ballot. This may be a tough vote: obviously if we can get rid of the law we can begin to talk about how MI can craft a recovery as a whole, rather than leaving behind our cities that have been devastated by globalization and segregation.

But I hope two of the other referenda on the ballot will help to push the EM repeal law over the top.

First, there's Protect Working Families (AKA Protect Our Jobs). If passed, it will make collective bargaining a constitutional right in MI. It's akin to OH's Prop 2, in that it will rally labor, in an even more heavily unionized state. I canvassed for this referendum over the weekend in a modest middle class neighborhood, and it seemed there was a lot of support.

Then there's Michigan Energy, Michigan Jobs. That will mandate 25% of MI's energy come from renewable sources by 2025. Grist's David Roberts described it as the country's most important clean energy vote this year, partly because of the way that clean energy could fundamentally alter our economic picture in the state.

Hell, according to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Michigan could power itself with onshore wind alone.

The more Michigan develops its local renewable resources, the more electricity generation becomes a boon, an economic growth engine, rather than merely a cost. Energy money stays in the state and circulates in local communities (Michigan already has a

substantial wind and solar supply chain [PDF]) rather than being transferred to out-of-state fossil-fuel companies. Michigan wins: more economic activity, more jobs, more pollution-free energy, more pride.

Those three referenda could dramatically make MI's economy more fair and sustainable. Which means there will be unbelievable amounts of money spent to defeat them.

And then there's the referendum that DDay called "Son of Prop 13," which would require a supermajority to raise taxes. It would effectively lock in the reapportionment of taxes that Rick Snyder put into place, and take an already dysfunctional legislature and add another barrier to fixing the state's woes.

Put that against the background of the Presidential election. One rule of MI politics is Democrats succeed when the state's African American population turns out. Rick Snyder vetoed the kind of voter suppression measures that FL and PA have passed, though there were already some prohibitive measures on the ballot, particularly effecting students. Which means the African Americans who try to vote should be able to. Then there's Obama's popularity, which for obvious reasons is probably greater than in any other rust belt state.

So we should have a fairly democratic electorate come out in November. Let's hope that makes the difference on these referenda.