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League of Women Voters of California, AARP, California Common Cause and CA Forward Vow to Fight Politicians' Scheme to Strip Power from Voters and Avoid Accountability

Groups respond as politicians submit signatures in an attempt to qualify their power grab for the November ballot

Sacramento - The League of Women Voters of California, AARP, California Common Cause and California Forward announced today that they will vigorously campaign against a measure that incumbent politicians are trying to qualify for the November ballot to overturn voter-approved Proposition 11. Labeling the measure a "politicians' power grab," these good government groups oppose the measure's efforts to strip power from voters by disbanding the Citizens Redistricting Commission.

A ballot committee supported by several incumbent members of Congress has submitted signatures in an attempt to qualify a November 2010 ballot measure to repeal Prop. 11 and allow legislators to draw their own election districts. It is unclear whether the politicians' measure will meet the qualification deadline, as they are submitting signatures several weeks behind the Secretary of State's recommended date for submission.

"Voters know it is an inherent conflict of interest for politicians to draw their own political districts. Rather than raise millions in special interest money to fight the voters' will to create an independent redistricting process, these politicians should be focused on serving the public's interest – not their own," said Kathay Feng, executive director of California Common Cause, the good government group that helped draft Prop. 11.

Several news reports have revealed that Congressman Howard Berman is a driving force behind the initiative, as is his brother, a redistricting consultant who has profited by drawing election districts to protect incumbent politicians. Congressman Berman's current district was challenged in court unsuccessfully by Latino rights organizations who claimed it had been unfairly gerrymandered to protect Berman and disadvantage Latino candidates. Campaign finance reports show that most of the measure's funders are legislators and congressional representatives. They were recently joined by a businessman

with a long history of political contributions to Berman and others, who poured \$2 million into the committee to overturn Prop. 11.

“The pure arrogance of this effort to overturn Prop. 11 is really stunning,” said Jeannine English, member of AARP national board of directors. “To think that voters would just fall in line to give more power to legislators so they can maintain the status quo gives real meaning to the phrase ‘tone deaf.’ It’s this kind of behavior that has earned politicians their lowest approval ratings in history.”

Indeed, recent polling on the measure to repeal Prop. 11 demonstrates that voters are not willing to give any more power to the politicians they believe are failing them. A recent statewide survey among likely voters found that only 35 percent of voters would support the Berman initiative. After hearing a short description of the measure, support plummets to 20 percent and opposition grows to 71 percent.

“Over 30,000 Californians applied to serve on the redistricting commission; this kind of citizen interest in redistricting is unprecedented. We are proud that Prop. 11 requires a 14-member commission that reflects the diversity of the state,” stated Janis R. Hirohama, president of the League of Women Voters of California. “The commission selection process and the mapping process are completely open and transparent – in a way that the legislative process never was. This attempt to give the power to redistrict back to legislators is cynical and deceptive.”

“This is exactly why Californians are fed up with politics as usual – we have politicians and their hired guns trying to kill reform before it’s been given a chance to work,” said Zabrae Valentine, executive director of the California Forward Action Fund. “The irony is that this behavior is what motivates voters to pass restrictive and punitive laws lawmakers then resent. Politicians need to respect the will of the voters, and we all need to come together as Californians to demand a new way of governing.”

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