

metrotimes

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How green is your candidate?

by News Hits staff

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Political headlines these days are dominated by the presidential campaign — and rightly so. It's important. And while we're happy that Republican frontrunner **John McCain** is in his 70s and Democrats **Hillary Clinton** and **Barack Obama** are female and African-American respectively, we just wish there was more coverage of their policies and less about their demographic features.

You know, like where they stand on those pesky things called *issues*.

So when the League of Conservation Voters last week issued its National Environmental Scorecard for 2007, we read it. It scores and reports the voting record of all members of Congress on a selected environmental issue. And as all three presidential candidates are U.S. senators, they're in there.

Since 1989, the nonprofit, nonpartisan group has published the scorecard annually for both chambers of Congress though the first scorecard was a report on the House in 1971. The senators and representatives receive a score from zero to 100, which reflects the percentage of their pro-environment votes. If they miss a vote, it counts as an "anti" environment vote. For the 2007 report, the league counted 15 votes in the Senate and 20 in the House.

The group analyzed how politicians voted in 2007 on fuel economy standards for cars and light trucks, renewable energy, policies for oil refineries, offshore drilling, liquid coal, the farm bill, oil subsidies, global warming, clean air, wolf recovery, family planning and other legislation.

Not all of the included legislation passed, but the league counts the adoption of the Energy Independence and Security Act as one of the biggest environmental successes of the year. The law raises to 35 miles per gallon the overall fuel economy of cars and light trucks by 2020 and will save an estimated 1.1 million barrels of oil per day as well as reduce pollution linked to global warming.

Congress also adopted a resolution calling for mandatory limits on global warming pollution and the approval of a National Intelligence Estimate to deal with the security implications of climate change.

"We think that 2007 really showed a turning point for the environment vote especially as it relates to clean energy and global warming," says **Kerry Duggan**, the league's campaigns manager. (Duggan, incidentally, is a Detroit-area native who now works for the Washington, D.C.-based group.)

Duggan says the new leadership and new members helped focus Congress on those issues. For example, Michigan's own Rep. **John Dingell**, D-Dearborn, now heads the House Energy and Commerce Committee. He scored a whopping 90 on the scorecard this year and has a lifetime score of 72. Dingell replaced Rep. **Joe Barton**, R-Texas, whose lifetime score is a dismal 7.

Congress's score as a whole was 53 percent. The Michigan House delegation averaged 45 and scored between zero (**Dave Camp**, R-Midland) and 90 (Dingell and **Sander Levin**, D-Southfield). The Dems averaged 83 while Republicans averaged a 20.

Senators **Carl Levin**, D-Detroit, and **Debbie Stabenow**, D-Lansing, both scored 67.

Among the presidential candidates, absenteeism affected their results, according to the league.

Clinton scored a 73, but had a perfect pro-environment record on the 11 issues she voted on. In previous league reports, she scored between 88 and 92.

McCain scored a *zero*. He missed all 15 votes that counted. In the past he's ranged from a 6 to a 56.

Obama had a 67, down from his 96 in the previous session. He missed three of the 15 votes used in the report. Of the 12 issues he did vote on, he voted anti-environment just once when he voted against establishing a Water Resources Commission that would prioritize water resource projects nationally.

Among the Michigan House delegation, all Democrats outscored all the Republicans except **Vernon Ehlers**, R-Grand Rapids, who had a 70, the same score as the lowest Democrat, **Bart Stupak**, D-Menominee.

Duggan says Ehlers is the "best example" to show that the environment is not a partisan issue. But **Mike Brownfield**, **Joe Knollenberg's** (R-Bloomfield Hills) campaign manager, says the league's scorecard is.

"This is just another politically motivated hit job by a group with a long-standing record of attacking Republicans," he says. Knollenberg has supported cleaning up the Rouge River, protecting the Great Lakes and improving Oakland County's drinking water during

his career — actions and positions that are not reflected in the league's scorecard. "Frankly, it's shocking that they don't consider any of that work," Brownfield says.

Dingell defends the league. "It's a good organization and a solid advocate for sound environmental policy," he told News Hits in an e-mail. "We don't agree on every issue, but more often than not, we're on the same side — fighting to protect our planet and reduce greenhouse gases."

While recent opinion polls have shown voters in the presidential campaign most concerned about the Iraq war and the economy, Duggan says the environment is on people's minds too. Of the league's infamous "Dirty Dozen" candidates — actually 13, and Knollenberg was on the list — in the 2006 election, nine were defeated. The league names a Dirty Dozen member of Congress during election years based on his or her poor environmental voting records and a belief that environmental issues can influence voters in those races.

The 2006 Dozen had lifetime scores of 8. Their replacements? 88.

"Elections really matter," Duggan says.

Dingell, for his part, predicts an environmental issue unique to the Midwest — and Michigan in particular — will move to the front of the national environmental agenda.

"I do think the country will start paying a lot more attention to the Great Lakes in the next few years," Dingell says. "Water is becoming a lot more precious around this country, and while we have a lot of it, I worry about the condition of it. Many of us have been fighting to protect the lakes for a while, but unfortunately the president has not made the lakes a priority. That needs to change."

To read the National Environmental Scorecard for 2007, go to www.lcv.org/scorecard.

MICHIGAN CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION		
Rep. Sander Levin	D	Southfield 90
Rep. John Dingell	D	Dearborn 90
Rep. John Conyers	D	Detroit 85
Rep. Dale Kildee	D	Flint 80
Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick	D	Detroit 80
Rep. Bart Stupak	D	Menominee 70
Rep. Vernon Ehlers	R	Grand Rapids 70
Sen. Carl Levin	D	Detroit 67
Sen. Debbie Stabenow	D	Lansing 67
Rep. Fred Upton	R	St. Joseph 35
Rep. Candice Miller	R	Harrison Township 25
Rep. Joe Knollenberg	R	Bloomfield Hills 20
Rep. Thaddeus McCotter	R	Livonia 15
Rep. Peter Hoekstra	R	Holland 5
Rep. Tim Walberg	R	Tipton 5
Rep. Mike Rogers	R	Brighton 5
Rep. Dave Camp	R	Midland 0