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2 members of the Board of State Canvassers put politics over voters | Opinion

Ruth Johnson

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Two Democratic members of the Michigan Board of State Canvassers voted Monday, Aug. 24, to disenfranchise 709,841 state residents who signed a petition supporting a ballot initiative requiring photo ID and verification of citizenship for voting in our state.

The initiative's sample was left just three signatures short of certification for the ballot after Democrats on the board refused to count the signatures of nine Michigan voters whose identities had been verified by a notary public, and who signed affidavits under penalty of perjury that the signatures on the petitions in question were theirs.

I understand many may be skeptical of this claim, or feel there must be more to the story. As someone who served as Michigan's secretary of state and oversaw this process with integrity for eight years, quite frankly, part of me wishes that was true. But I can say unequivocally that what happened on Aug. 24 was not based on the law or on facts; it was based on politics, partisanship and the weaponization of what is supposed to be a ministerial board – that ironically exists to prevent the very thing it carried out.

Chairman Richard Houskamp repeatedly pointed out that these are “real people who are real voters who have signed these petitions.” But those words failed to deter the

orchestrated shenanigans of the board's two Democratic members.

At one point, Michigan Elections Director Jonathan Brater, inquiring about one of the affidavits, asked Democratic Vice Chair Mary Ellen Gurewitz, "So you're not going to make a decision on that one?" To which she replies, "I think the signature matches, but whether it should be counted ... um ... I think we should decide later."

I agree with Houskamp's conclusion following these remarks from Gurewitz: "So you're going to hold the voter hostage is what I hear you saying." You should not have to stop to check the count before giving credit for a signature you have already acknowledged is valid.

Isn't that called cheating?

In another exchange, Brater states about another voter's signature, "We would recommend counting that as valid." The two Republicans on the board agree. But when Houskamp turns to Democratic member Heather Cummings to ask whether the signature should be counted, she replies curtly, "No."

Houskamp double-checks, "You don't believe it should [be counted]?" To which Cummings again answers with a single word: "Nope."

While I support the proposed constitutional amendment and presumably Gurewitz and Cummings do not, this is not about the content of the ballot initiative. It is about equal protection, due process and following the laws and our state constitution.

The Michigan Constitution says: "Amendments may be proposed to this constitution by petition of the registered electors of this state." That is a right guaranteed to the people of Michigan. Two rogue board members are trying to steal people's right to vote on an initiative where 80% of voters support what it does — ensure integrity in our elections.

Two unelected members of an obscure state board cannot be allowed to strip away the constitutional rights of nearly one in 10 adults in our state who signed a petition

to place this issue before voters. But without intervention of the Michigan Supreme Court, that is exactly what is poised to happen.

I look forward to a fair and expedient hearing to ensure that the people of Michigan have the right to vote on this proposal, whose sponsors submitted 60% more signatures than needed for placement on the ballot nearly six months ago on March 4.

Aug. 24 was a very sad day for our state. Political motives laid themselves bare, stripping away the integrity of a board meant to be impartial.

The justices of our Supreme Court now have an opportunity to remedy this travesty. I hope that they will.

State Sen. Ruth Johnson, R-Holly, represents Michigan's 24th Senate District and formerly served as secretary of state.