

# It's a party primary—to play you have to join the club

By TOM LONERGAN

Sign a membership card, get a vote. That's not the slogan being used by the Michigan Democratic Party to recruit new members, but it sums up what you have to do to vote in the party's presidential nominating caucuses.

You have to be a party member to cast your preference for either President Jimmy Carter, U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy or California Gov. Jerry Brown at the closed party caucuses to be held April 26 in each congressional district throughout southeast Michigan.

AND IF YOU'RE not a card carrying Democrat as of 5 p.m. Tuesday, or if you weren't elected a precinct delegate in 1978 — find something else to do April 26.

Tuesday is the deadline the Democrats have set for recruiting new members to participate in the caucuses, where national convention delegates will also be selected.

For a membership application, contact the Oakland County Democratic Party in Bloomfield Hills at 334-0971.

According to several Democratic officials and Carter and Kennedy campaign interviewees last week, new party recruits actually don't have to sign anything, pay anything or be a registered voter to join the Democrats by Tuesday. But they must eventually sign that they are party members before the April 26 vote.

The Carter and Kennedy campaigns and their major organizational supporters, the Michigan Education Association and the United Auto Workers, respectively, have been the most active in recruiting new party members. The Kennedy headquarters is at 17000 W. Eight Mile, Southfield, phone 552-0980.

"THEORETICALLY, there'll be a screening by the party's state central committee in Lansing between now and April 26 so members have an internal check," said James Doyon of Madison Heights, an Oakland County com-

missioner and Kennedy supporter. Doyon has been recruiting new members in the 18th Congressional District, which includes Troy.

For many new party members, the \$10 membership fee (\$2 for senior citizens and retirees, \$3 for students) has been waived.

"We've not here to make money for the Michigan Democratic Party," said Ken Kruly, Kennedy's Michigan campaign coordinator. Kruly said potential recruits are told the fee is optional.

At Kennedy headquarters in Southfield, a phone call will put you on the eligible list to vote.

If a person calls in and gives the information needed on the form, "we'll fill out the form for them, take it to the state office by 5 p.m. Tuesday and that will qualify them," Kruly said.

Kruly said Kennedy's Michigan supporters have recruited 1,000 new members statewide.

ANNE R. BESER, the Carter campaign's southeast Michigan coordinator, said both Carter and Kennedy organizations agreed to ask for the membership fee, "but if anyone does not want to pay it, we won't push it."

The Carter campaign has recruiting coordinators in each congressional district and a "massive phone bank," Ms. Beser said.

Both she and Kruly agreed that many may miss the Tuesday deadline to join the party, either because they don't know the procedure or by choice.

"We're very, very concerned about folks feeling left out in April," Ms. Beser said. She predicts the closed caucuses "will cause problems."

Kruly said there's "just not a lot of major interest in politics at this point by a lot of people." He thinks the recruiting effort by the Carter and Kennedy organizations and the state party will ease "less than expected."

Those who were Democratic precinct delegates in 1978 and dues paying party members last year (the estimate is 10,000) are automatically eligible to

vote in the caucuses. How many new members have been added appears to be anyone's guess, although it's been reported the Democrats are aiming to recruit an additional 20,000.

"Where we are is we're up to our necks," said Shirley Gray of the state party's Detroit office.

Ms. Gray said it's a party requirement that members be registered voters, but the "ultimate decision" will be up to the congressional districts whether non-registered voters may participate in the caucus.

KAY PENNER, executive director

of the Oakland County Democratic Party, says new members will be checked before the caucus.

"We make every attempt to verify there is a real person at that address and phone number (listed on the membership form)," she said.

Kathy Brown, of Troy, Oakland Democratic chairwoman, predicts membership there will double (to 1,000) thanks to the recruiting drives. But she adds, "There's still a lot of misinformation, apathy and ignorance about the process."

And "the process" isn't universally embraced by Democrats.

Former state Democratic chairman Zolton Ferency has asked state election officials to declare the closed nominating caucuses illegal. But the State Board of Canvassers is waiting for an attorney general's opinion in the matter.

"They're not sure if they have this power," said Jim Chapman of the Secretary of State's office in Lansing. Ferency says state party leaders are trying to close the political process. He's expected to go to court if state officials don't overturn the caucus system.

FERENCY HAS has a local ally in

Doyon, vice chairman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' Democratic Caucus.

"It (presidential nominating) is too important a decision to leave to politicians," Doyon said.

Deputy Wayne County Clerk Orville Tugate, who is also 2nd Congressional District chairman, is a staunch supporter of the caucus system. The 2nd district includes the Plymouth area and Livonia.

"Sometimes people forget this is a party primary," Tugate said. "If you don't participate in a party, you don't get to play."

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