



Rights equal power

A lot has been said and written these days about where we are headed as a country. Are we still a Republic? Are we still a democracy?

We at the League of Women Voters of Rochester Metropolitan Area respond by saying as long as we citizens show up at our local government meetings — village, town, county and city — to ask the important questions and demand transparency from our elected officials, as well as the departments that serve us, then we are still a country with a future to be proud of.

James Madison, called the Father of the Constitution, said it best: “a well-instructed people alone can be permanently free.” Yes, “We the People” ... “in order to form a more perfect union” need to be “instructed” (or informed) about our government and our role in making it work for us.

Sunshine Week was initiated as a nationwide effort to open up dialogue on the importance of transparent government with freedom of information. It is celebrated in mid-March to coincide with James Madison’s birthday on March 16. This initiative originated from the work of several newspapers, and it has grown, in

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large part, because of media’s continued support. The League commends this paper for its Watchdog Reports such as “Rescuing Rochester’s Children” and “Who Should Pay for the Erie Canal”?

How well do our local governments share information? We all have the right to know what our government is doing and why — both its successes and failures. Exercising our right to know gives us — the public — power. It allows us to contribute to our governments and hold our governments accountable. But these laws are only as good as we demand that they be.

For decades, League members have acted as government watchdogs at federal, state and local levels. We have an Observer Corps of volunteers who report on transparency of government and on the issues we care about. Why not join us in seeing history in the making? Contact the League through its website at www.lwv-rma.org.

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