



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

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REDISTRICTING

A basic tenet of our democracy is the "One Citizen - One Vote" concept. Following the decennial census, redistricting to create voting districts approximately equal to the population is a basic step in ensuring that each citizen's vote in an election carries the same weight.

During its first regular session following publication of each United States decennial census, the legislature is required by the Texas Constitution to redraw state house and senate districts; in addition, following this census, the U.S. Constitution calls for reapportionment of Congressional seats according to population. The legislature will be required by the Texas Constitution to submit a redistricting plan in the year 2011. Historically, the redistricting plan in Texas has been fraught with problems. Following the 2000 census, after partisan wrangling and court hearings, one Congressional district was changed.

The League of Women Voters of Texas believes that an independent commission charged with drawing boundaries for Congressional and Texas Senate and House districts would prevent the difficulties of the past, and the League urges the legislature to establish such a commission. The League also believes that protecting the value of each vote in an election should be the paramount goal during the redistricting process. This goal would be furthered by the establishment of an independent commission with the responsibility of formulating a redistricting plan, designating boundaries for Congressional and Texas Senate and House Districts.

Redistricting Guidelines

- . Districts should be apportioned on the basis of equal population.
- . Districts should be single member and contiguous.
- . Districts should be compact, district lines should coincide with the boundaries of local political subdivisions, and districts should not be drawn to dilute the voting strength of minority populations.
- . Consideration should not be given to factors such as retention of incumbents or political party strength.

The League also endorses the use of statistical sampling as a proven scientific technique that, when properly used, can improve the accuracy and lower the costs of ascertaining the population count.

Organization and Operation of the Commission

- . The commission should be appointed, bipartisan, small in size, and composed of an odd number of members.
- . Specific provisions should be made for automatic court review, preferably with the Texas Supreme Court having original jurisdiction.
- . The commission would operate under definite, pre-established time limits for each step in the process.
- . As soon as census figures become available, the commission would begin its work and would hold hearings around the state, allowing citizens to voice their concerns.
- . After convening in 2011, the legislature would receive the redistricting plan and would ultimately be responsible for its final approval.

Advantages of Having the Commission

- . No member of the commission would be a member of the legislature or hold any elected office. Although there would be pressure on the commission members, it would not be as great, nor would there be as much personal involvement, as occurs with sitting legislators.
- . The commission could focus on the task of redistricting outside the legislative process.
- . The elected legislature would still have the final say concerning the plan.

With the goal of making redistricting fair, orderly, and less partisan, the League of Women Voters strongly supports establishment of an independent redistricting commission, operating within strict guidelines and time limits. The League further recommends that the legislature place a high priority on establishment of such a commission during the 2009 session.

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