



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

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REDISTRICTING

“One Person, One Vote” is a basic tenet of our democracy. Redistricting after the decennial census to create voting districts approximately equal in population is a basic step in ensuring that each citizen’s vote carries the same weight in an election.

The Texas Constitution requires the legislature to redistrict house and senate seats during its first regular session following publication of each United States decennial census; the U.S. Constitution calls for reapportionment of congressional seats according to population from a decennial census. The State Board of Education (SBOE) districts also need to be redrawn.

Following the 2000 census, the court-approved redistricting plan was put into place. In the 2003 regular session, the legislature took the unusual step to reconsider the congressional boundaries. After several special sessions called for this purpose, the current boundaries were adopted. Court challenges ensued. Such redistricting fights are costly to taxpayers and legislators alike and diminish the efficacy of legislative efforts. This process can be improved.

The League believes that protection of the value, or weight, of each vote in an election should be the paramount goal during the redistricting process. Toward that end, **League members support the establishment of a commission with the initial responsibility of formulating a redistricting plan designating boundaries for Congressional, Texas Senate and Texas House districts.**

Redistricting Commission Guidelines:

The commission and the legislature would operate within strict guidelines. The League of Women Voters urges consideration of the following guidelines:

- the commission should be appointed, bipartisan, small in size, and composed of an odd number of members
- if a commission is not initially responsible, the legislature should conduct the work of redistricting during a special session called for the sole purpose of redistricting; the special session should operate within a short, strict time frame
- the state legislature should be responsible for final approval of the redistricting plan
- specific provisions should be made for automatic court review, preferably with the Texas Supreme Court having original jurisdiction
- the commission should operate under definite, pre-established time limits for each step in the process.

ADVOCACY PAPER

Districting 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. Racial and language minorities are already protected under the Voting Rights Act. It does not serve the interests of citizens to give special consideration to other non-protected groups.

Further, the League 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. A bipartisan commission would be appointed. This commission would be small in size and would have an odd number of members. As soon as the census figures were available, the commission would begin its work. The commission would be responsible for holding hearings around the state and then would begin drawing district lines. The commission would submit the plan to the legislature for approval.

There are several advantages of having the commission draw the initial plan:

- No member of the commission would be a member of the legislature. 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 without having additional legislative duties.
- The elected legislature would have the final say on the plans. Currently, the legislature loses control when it fails to devise a plan.

The League's proposal does not differ greatly from what happens now in Texas, but it puts the work of the commission into a more logical sequence. We suggest reversing the process that now occurs in the state of Texas. Currently, the legislature does the initial work and a commission in the form of the Legislative Redistricting Board comes into play when the legislature fails to act.

The League of Women Voters is convinced that its proposal of a commission, operating within strict guidelines and time limits, would be a vast improvement over our present redistricting process. The legislature should place a high priority on establishing a more orderly process in this session.