

BIPARTISAN REDISTRICTING

citizens

Ensure Integrity in the Process

Statement of the Issue

A surge of interest has developed across Virginia regarding the redistricting process which will follow the 2010 U.S. Census. The current system for drawing legislative district lines promotes “partisan redistricting” which gives the party controlling the General Assembly the power to decide how districts get carved up. This system has taken decision-making out of the hands of voters and resulted in the extreme partisanship and gridlock that have prevented real progress on issues like renewable energy, land use and climate change, among many others. Shifting responsibility for redistricting to a bipartisan commission will increase electoral competition, increase responsiveness to conservation issues and spur the policy innovation that is so desperately needed in Virginia.



party. With the advent of powerful mapping technologies, these delegates and senators can now use computers to draw preferential, gerrymandered, or “safe,” districts to a degree never before seen (only 17 of 140 seats saw competitive elections in 2007).

Allowing representatives to determine whom they represent inverts the very purpose of democratic voting. Districts drawn according to political affiliations typically cut through geographic features, dividing communities and representational interests. By drawing “party stronghold” districts, real electoral decisions are moved from general elections to primaries, where as few as one percent of eligible voters decide who wins.

Seven states have placed redistricting in the hands of non-partisan commissions in an effort to strengthen the integrity of their political process. In Iowa such commissions pass committee-designed maps without much deliberation, signaling broad approval of the process, and further bolstering public confidence in the system. To remedy these issues in Virginia, the General Assem-

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Background

Every decade, Virginia legislators convene to redraw the lines of our state’s electoral districts. Traditionally, whoever has been in control of the General Assembly has dictated and controlled the process and drawn lines favorable to their own

Recommendations: Bipartisan Redistricting

Within the umbrella of an independent commission, there are a variety of policy options available. While obviously a successful bill is more important than any particular suggestion, we recommend the following:

- Create a bipartisan commission to design and draw up new district maps.
- By creating a balanced group of appointees, who then select an apolitical member to lead them, a sense of political equality is introduced to the redistricting process.
- Districts should reflect our communities. The commission should redraw district boundaries with the express intent of making districts compact, keeping communities together, and increasing competition in elections, while avoiding the creation of artificially competitive districts.
- Allow public submissions and input into the design process. With the proliferation of cheap mapping technologies, the public now has the capability to create maps just as effectively as the General Assembly. By allowing and encouraging their input, a greater sense of fairness and accountability is instilled into the bipartisan commission. Furthermore, this allows public support to coalesce around certain map proposals, resulting in greater civic participation by the citizenry and a greater awareness of what has long been considered an arcane and highly technical process.
- Preserves the General Assembly's traditional role. The maps proposed by the commission would go back to the General Assembly for final approval, maintaining a level of accountability.

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bly should institute bi-partisan redistricting.

In 2009, the Virginia Redistricting Coalition brought together faith, business, conservation and civic organizations to promote reform of Virginia's redistricting process. Political momentum grew tremendously, gaining the support of Governor Kaine, Lt. Governor Bolling, several former

Governors, the entire State Senate, and many community leaders. In addition, Governor-elect Bob McDonnell, publicly stated his support for a bi-partisan redistricting process. The pro-reform coalition will build on this momentum in 2010.

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