

LWV Ohio Statehouse Day – March 19, 2013

LWVO Lobbyist Report

Redistricting

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The League of Women Voters of Ohio has long been involved with the issue of redistricting. Representatives should be responsive to voters but our current redistricting process has created an unnatural number of “safe seats” – where a candidate of a given party is virtually assured of winning the general election. Redistricting can also create representatives who, in the aggregate, do not reflect the political will of the voters. In 2012, for example, 51% of the total vote in Ohio went to Republican Congressional candidates. However, the Ohio delegation to Congress consists of 4 Democrats and 12 Republicans – or 75% Republican. There is a similar mismatch at the state level with Republicans traditionally holding a large majority in the Ohio Senate despite Ohio voters being nearly evenly split between Republicans and Democrats. Thirty years ago, when the Democrats were in charge of drawing the lines, similar mismatches existed, only at that time they benefited the Democrats. No matter which party draws the lines, the districts end up unnaturally favoring that party – not favoring the voters.

Currently, under the Ohio Constitution, the Ohio Apportionment Board, consisting of the Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor, one Republican and one Democrat appointed by the legislature, draws the district lines for the Ohio House and Senate seats. The General Assembly, subject to the veto of the Governor, draws the lines for the Congressional districts.

Redistricting has been in the forefront for several years. The Ohio Senate and House passed resolutions in 2009 and 2010 reforming redistricting, but failed to come up with a compromise resolution both bodies could pass. In 2011, the League along with other partners sponsored the Redistricting Competition, which showed districts could be drawn that are fair to Ohio voters. At the same time, the Apportionment Board and the General Assembly redistricted the General Assembly and Congressional districts. In 2012 the voters had an opportunity to enact redistricting reform when Issue 2 was on the ballot. Unfortunately that measure failed. In December of 2012 the Senate passed SJR 5, which provided for redistricting reform. That bill required 1 vote from the minority party in order to pass a redistricting plan, and in that sense was a bi-partisan bill. It had bi-partisan support.

In January of 2013, the Senate introduced SJR 1. It has bi-partisan sponsorship and is thought to be the vehicle the legislature is going to use to reform redistricting. Senate Majority Leader Faber has stated he wants the legislature to act on redistricting. Speaker Batchelder has indicated he wants the Constitutional Modernization Commission to address redistricting reform. The League will be monitoring both areas and provide input as necessary.

Action Needed

Tell your representatives that it is urgent to reform the redistricting process, and that you want your representatives selected by a process that does not unnaturally favor one party over the other and that provides voters a choice in November.