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OUR REDISTRICTING MESSAGE FOR LOBBY DAY 2020

PEOPLE POWERED MAPS

The League of Women Voters regards the upcoming redistricting following the 2020 census as one of the most important issues before our state and nation. In 2021 the lines will be redrawn for South Carolina's districts in the US House of Representative and the South Carolina General Assembly's House and Senate. Who will draw these lines, and how will they do it? We support H.3054, a bill with bipartisan support, as a sound way forward for South Carolina.

WHY IS REDISTRICTING OUR FIRST PRIORITY IN 2020?

Elections should be decided by citizens at the polls, not by incumbents drawing district lines.

The League is not concerned with changing district lines to change partisan outcomes. We are working for the voters! We believe that maps should give voters a choice at the polls in November. This will:

- reduce political polarization by promoting districts in which legislators must consider the view of a wide range of citizen perspectives and
- reduce voter apathy – many voters don't vote because they don't believe that their votes matter.
- broaden the political conversation – when there is no competition for a seat, there is no public debate about issues and priorities for our communities and state

South Carolina has many noncompetitive districts. There are several important points about this.

- Not every district will be competitive in November elections, even when redistricting is unbiased. In some areas the distribution of people in our communities and regions makes drawing a district that will be competitive in November elections difficult or impossible.
- Nevertheless, a district in which candidates must put their ideas before the public in a competitive race is the ideal that should be the goal whenever possible. It is then the responsibility of the political parties to work to provide good candidates for the consideration of voters. Unfortunately, for too many incumbents, the goal is a noncompetitive district that ensures not just their reelection, but their easy reelection.
- Studies by the League's Matt Saltzman and information from AARP's John Ruoff show that South Carolina's Congressional maps do NOT at present show substantial intentional partisan gerrymandering. We continue to study General Assembly districts.
- Too many districts are defined for incumbent (in contrast to partisan) protection. In SC, aside from geographic distributions ("self-sorting") incumbent protection is the most common source of uncompetitive districts. Over the decades, members of both parties have protected themselves at the expense of voters, who are left – intentionally – with little or no choice in November.
- It is sometimes claimed that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) compliance requires that some districts be heavily packed with minority voters. This is not true. VRA compliance requires that voters have a fair chance of electing a candidate of their choice, not a district packed to any greater extent.

- Hispanic voters matter too. There should be attention to the voting patterns of Hispanic populations and whether they are concentrated in some portions of the state to an extent that should be considered in redistricting.

PUT VOTERS FIRST

We support H.3054. This bill provides a redistricting process and criteria that would give voters the opportunity they deserve to contribute to selecting the representatives of their choice in the U. S. House of Representatives, the SC House of Representatives, and the SC Senate.

We very much hope this bill will be considered and passed, but however that turns out the League is in this for the long haul. We intend to work in a positive way for the best possible outcomes for voters throughout the redistricting process.

WE NEED:

- **Meaningful public involvement in the redistricting process.**
 - **An independent nonpartisan commission** to draw district lines is the best method of avoiding the negative impacts of self-interest by incumbent politicians
 - **Whoever draws the lines, we need opportunities for the public to comment on redistricting standards and criteria, process, and outcomes,**
 - **We need opportunities for the public to submit map proposals, and**
 - **We must have a practical mechanism for consideration of maps submitted by the public in the official process.**
- **Transparency through**
 - **Public access to guidelines and data used in mapping**
 - **public hearings to solicit input on districts and**
 - **public discussion of data and criteria** leading to maps to be submitted for a final vote.
- **Exclusion of partisan protection from criteria**
 - **Outcomes of earlier elections** should **not** be part of the data used in developing maps.
- **Exclusion of incumbent protection from criteria**
 - **While there are reasonable arguments in favor of protecting the core of existing districts in drawing new maps, districts should not be subjected to excessive manipulation to allow current incumbents to retain their seats** when other criteria point toward a different outcome.

H.3054, introduced by a bipartisan group of House members, is a sound approach to achieve this. It does not exclude legislators as some bills do, but instead builds in citizen participation and transparency as well as reasonable criteria. Public hearings are a minimal, but not sufficient, mechanism for additional public input.

2020 is the last legislative session in which a reform bill could pass to reform the process after release of census data in March 2021, and we want to see that happen.

The League is committed to staying with the redistricting process as it continues. It is our hope that in 2021 we will be able to thank everyone who has been involved for producing maps that are fair to all our citizens, whatever their partisan affiliation.