



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA

801 12th Street, Suite 220, Sacramento, California 95814
(916) 442-7215 ■ Fax (916) 442-7362
Web site: www.lwvc.org ■ Email: lwvc@lwvc.org

OFFICERS

January 13, 2005

President

Jacqueline Jacobberger
South San Francisco

Executive Vice President

Barbara Hopkins
Sacramento

Secretary

Pat Richardson
San Diego

Treasurer

Donna Chipps
Sacramento

DIRECTORS

Communications

Lynda Hungerford
Santa Rosa

Development

Jean Matsuura
Hillsborough

Director-at-Large

Wendy Phillips
Manhattan Beach

Educational Activities

Roberta Davis
Pasadena

Legislation/Advocacy

Marion Taylor
Santa Cruz

Member Services

Beverly King
Santa Barbara

Natural Resources

John Sullivan
Claremont

Social Policy

Kathy Webb
Fresno

Voters Service

Sue Kelley
Ventura

Voters Service

Nikki Harris
Oakland

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor of California
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Redistricting reform

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

Reform of the process for drawing legislative and congressional district lines is one of the changes in California government that you have called for in recent months. In our work to promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive, the League of Women Voters of California has concluded that redistricting reform is long overdue. We believe that Californians will be best served by open, constructive examination of the options for improving this process.

There are three important elements for restructuring the redistricting process:

- It should include maximum opportunity for public scrutiny.
- Standards that promote fair and effective representation should be applied.
- Redistricting should be conducted by an independent commission.

Independent redistricting commission.

The public has been frustrated repeatedly by the legislature's record on redistricting, a record that shows that legislators' chief interests are incumbent protection and party benefit. In a study of the issue our members concluded that redistricting should be done by an independent commission, rather than by the legislature, if desired standards are to be applied objectively. We prefer a bipartisan commission that would include citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and representation of minority group interests. The membership of a carefully chosen body would reflect California's diversity of population and varied geography, as well as a balance of economic, social and partisan interests. Adequate financing is essential for the efficient performance of the commission's duties.

Transparent process.

As in all government activities, Californians' right to know and to participate in the redistricting process must be protected. We support a clear timeline for the process that will include:

- readily accessible outreach hearings or workshops
- public access to plans and documentation
- hearings on the plans proposed for adoption
- sufficient time for public review before final decisions are made.

Redistricting criteria.

In 1964 Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote that the goal of legislative apportionment is “fair and effective representation.” Attaining that goal depends on how well the standards for a "fair" plan are spelled out. They should be prioritized, since even desirable standards commonly conflict, and for every standard applied, it often becomes harder to apply another.

The League believes that the standards on which a redistricting plan is based should include, in accord with existing constitutional and federal statutory requirements:

- substantially equal population
- protection from diluting the voting strength of minorities.

A fair redistricting plan should not allow:

- the goal of protecting incumbents
- preferential treatment of one political party.

Additional standards supported by the League of Women Voters are:

- geographic contiguity
and to the extent possible,
- respect for the boundaries of cities and counties
- preservation and protection of other identifiable “communities of interest.”

Other considerations.

We are aware that a number of redistricting reform proposals are being developed: an initiative that has been certified for signature gathering, at least two proposed legislative constitutional amendments, and some five additional initiatives submitted to the Attorney General for title and summary. Taken together, they offer a wide range of approaches to the three elements we listed above.

The League will attempt to evaluate each of these proposals in light of our positions on redistricting and will inform both League members and the general public of our assessment of them. We have concerns about some provisions that differ considerably from the positions on redistricting developed by our members, and we will give them special attention. Examples include a small redistricting commission composed entirely of retired judges; a requirement for approval of plans by a vote of the people; and a demand for redistricting immediately upon passage of the initiative. Analyses of the various proposals and guidelines for independent redistricting commissions are also being prepared by other public interest organizations with which we are in contact.

If redistricting reform is to benefit all the people of California, an open and frank discussion of the merits of each of the proposals will be required. Adopting an independent commission for drawing district lines has the potential to make every California citizen's vote more meaningful. However, if done poorly, such a change could reduce fairness and worsen partisan battles. We urge your careful consideration of all options and hope to participate in crafting real reform for Californians.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jacqueline Jacobberger
President