



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Craig M. Johnson

Senator Johnson Spearheads Groundbreaking Independent Redistricting Legislation

CRAIG M. JOHNSON May 10, 2010

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Most Significant Albany Reform in a Generation Passes Senator Johnson's Committee

The Senate Standing Committee on Investigations and Government Operations May 4 approved independent redistricting reform legislation that would eliminate the practice of partisan gerrymandering of New York State Congressional, State Senate, and State Assembly districts and give residents a clear voice in their representation, the committee's chairman, Senator Craig M. Johnson, (D-Nassau), announced.

This bill (S.1614A) establishes a citizen reapportionment commission that draws maps for congressional and state legislative districts every 10 years following the U.S. Census.

Currently, the Legislature retains the power to draw its own lines, which legislative leaders has used to draw non-competitive districts for favored colleagues and punish dissidents and minority conference members.

“This measure would shutter the smoke filled rooms where legislative leaders drew legislative maps that favored incumbents, diluted the voice of certain constituencies by splitting up their communities, and calcified their hold on the levers of power,” said Senator Johnson, who also helped sponsor the bill. “I believe that the voters should pick their representative, not the other way around. That is why I used my position as Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Investigations and Government Operations to advance this very important legislation.”

Senator Johnson's committee is the first in this state's history to pass an independent redistricting bill.

“New York State residents have the right to a fair and nonpartisan redistricting process, in which they choose their elected officials and not vice versa,” said Senator Valesky, the bill's main sponsor. “This legislation benefits all New Yorkers by eliminating partisan influence designed to preserve majorities and incumbents, and creating districts that are cohesive

geographically and culturally.”

Under the legislation, district lines for all plans would be drawn to be compact, equal in population and contiguous; not abridge or deny minority voting rights; and align with local boundaries and community character to ensure the even-handed and non-partisan drawing of lines.

Independent commission members could not currently hold or, in the past two years, have held elective or public office, been a lobbyist, been in a position within a political party, or be a relative or spouse of an elected or public official.

The commission would hold public hearings throughout the state on the primary apportionment plan submitted to the Legislature, ensuring transparency and public input.

The process proposed in this bill is similar to the one successfully implemented in Iowa, and is supported by the leading good government organizations and reform advocates in New York, including former New York City Mayor Edward Koch, Citizens Union and NYPIRG. It is also supported by editorial boards across the state, including the New York Times and the New York Daily News, as well as all major possible candidates for Governor, including Andrew Cuomo.

A 2006 report by a coalition of these groups, “Unfair Advantage: New York State’s Redistricting Process,” said “American representative democracy is

based on a system of ‘one person, one vote.’ However, New York State’s redistricting system undermines that concept. It is a system that cries out for change.” The report may be viewed at:<http://www.nypirg.org/goodgov/redistrictniReport4.20.06.pdf>

