



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Addabbo to NYS Legislators: “Be Heroes of Redistricting Reform, Not Zeroes”

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR March 1, 2011

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Queens, NY, February 28, 2011 -- NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr., ranking member of the Senate Elections Committee, releases his views on some recently introduced bills by both parties, to bring independent redistricting reform to New York State.

“Our state has had some of the worst gerrymandering in America. For decades, the two major parties collaborated in drawing district lines in such a way that almost every election is foreordained.

Over the last 12 years, 96 percent of incumbents up for reelection won. Since 1970, in fact, only 40 incumbents have lost their seats in an election – out of more than 4,000 races. The longer legislators stay in office, the less their policy choices conform to public opinion in their districts.

“I believe that the way our district lines are drawn should be done in a fair, nonpartisan, more transparent process based on objective standards and certainly determined by a much more reasonable process than that used by prior legislative leaders. You only need to look at a map of our State Senate or congressional districts to see the contortions that past legislatures have gone through in drawing district boundaries to make sure that they could hold onto power and keep reelecting their members. “It’s past time to change that problematic system. That’s why I signed former mayor Ed Koch’s New York Uprising’s pledge, joining 54 of 62 members of the Senate and 84 of 150 members of the Assembly to find the solution to encourage and increase the number of competitive elections, encourage voter participation and move us closer to a more responsible and responsive state government.”

After signing their own New York Uprising pledges, two bills, S.2543 and A.3432, known as Independent Redistricting Commission Legislation, were introduced by Senator Mike Gianaris (D-Queens) and Assemblymember Hakeem Jeffries (D-Brooklyn) to amend Legislative Law. Senator David Valesky (D-Oneida) had previously introduced an almost identical bill. Under S.2543, a Citizen Apportionment Commission would be established, rather than the legislature, which would draw maps for congressional

and state

legislative district boundaries for New York State every 10 years following the U.S. Census.

The proposed

boundaries would be submitted to the legislature for approval. As many as three plans

would be developed,

with public hearings required if the first two plans are rejected, at which the legislature

would testify

to the commission regarding any objections to the plan. The legislature would have the

ability to amend

only a third plan, which would be submitted by the commission. All apportionment plans

would be drawn

according to the following principles: all congressional district plans shall be nearly equal in

population

as practicable; districts shall be continuous; districts shall not be established that abridge or

deny

minority voting rights; districts shall not be drawn to favor or oppose any political party

incumbent,

or candidates for office; the most and least populous senate and assembly districts shall not

exceed the

mean population of districts for each house by more than one percent; counties and county

subdivisions

shall not be divided in the formation of districts; villages shall not be divided; districts shall

be as

compact as possible; and districts shall unite “communities of interest” (considered to be

based on shared

geographic, social, economic and other similar factors). Senate Republicans recently

introduced their very

similar S.3419 by the Committee on Rules, the Governor's Independent Redistricting Program Bill (#3).

It proposes a new Independent Redistricting Commission, and incorporates parts of the "NY Uprising/Senator Gianaris"

approach to independent redistricting plus several provisions and criteria included in legislation proposed by

Senator Martin Malavé Dilan (D-Brooklyn). The governor's bill also provides for scheduling of commission appointments,

redistricting plan development and plan approval. So far, 74 legislators have already added their names as

cosponsors, including Assembly Speaker/Democrat Sheldon Silver and Senate Republican Leader Dean Skelos. The bill

meets all of the criteria laid out in the New York Uprising pledge. It is vital for this bill to pass ASAP to

meet redistricting process deadlines. The new census numbers are in; the Commission must be operational and the

process of map-drawing has to begin this summer to be ready for the 2012 election.

The Senator added, "New Yorkers are seeking a better government. A January 27 Quinnipiac University poll indicated that by a

2 to 1 margin, New York voters support a nonpartisan, independent redistricting commission.

"I plan to join

co-sponsoring legislators on March 1 for Mayor Koch's rally at the state Capitol to keep my campaign promise.

We must push for the governor's Redistricting Reform Bill to support changes in

redistricting laws and other

measures, or we aren't "Heroes of Reform" in Albany—we're zeroes. Even legislators who did not sign the pledge

should rally with us if they support the principle of impartial legislative redistricting, without political

interests in mind. "Let's get to work immediately so that Governor Cuomo's bill is enacted in time for the

impartial commission to conduct public hearings and complete its work by this fall's deadlines."

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