



Hands on

I'm not a fan of governing by initiative

petition since making laws is the job of our state legislators, who presumably have the time and expertise to hold hearings, deliberate and compromise until a new law emerges. However, there are times when citizens must take matters into their own hands if legislators cannot or will not act in our best interests.

I've seen the redistricting process up close and personal, having served in the 2001 and 2011 Legislatures. I've heard plenty of righteous speeches about fairness and transparency and heard the public debate about this map or that one. And I've seen the real negotiations hidden behind the scenes, out of public view. Individual legislators look out for themselves first, their party second and their constituents third. The national parties secretly interfere in the process with a singular goal of drawing new congressional districts to their advantage. These things will never change.

The truth is legislators are absolutely the worst people to be given the responsibility

for reapportionment as it's simply impossible to separate their self-interest from their constitutional duty.

That's why Nevada's League of Women Voters has filed a ballot initiative to join eight other states and create a redistricting commission of bipartisan appointees charged with ending the partisan gerrymandering that protects incumbents and the party in power. In Nevada, redistricting has produced lopsided legislative districts; in the 2018 elections, 13 Nevada Assembly seats and a Senate race were uncontested—leaving voters with no choice to make.

Critics of the concept of an independent redistricting commission say the appointees will be partisans themselves, although the initiative specifies they cannot have been a candidate or elected official, a lobbyist, an officer in a political party, or a paid campaign worker. Undoubtedly, the parties will work hard to appoint people who favor their side, but, even if they succeed in placing stealth supporters on the commission, it can't

possibly be as conflicted as a legislator's desire for self-preservation.

You won't see many elected Democrats in Nevada supporting the redistricting initiative since the party currently controls state government and stands to gain even more seats with complete control over the next reapportionment. In fact, Governor Steve Sisolak is already putting a damper on the idea, saying recently the proposed commission would not "be truly independent" since commissioners will be political appointments. A whisper campaign to attack proponents of the idea as Republican dupes has already begun and a lawsuit has been filed by a pastor in Las Vegas with ties to the Democratic party, claiming the commissioners won't adequately represent the state's diversity.

Our neighboring states of California, Arizona and Idaho have successfully implemented independent redistricting commissions. They're not perfect, but they're vastly preferable to the self-dealing systems they replaced. California's Citizens Redistricting

Commission even won the 2017 Harvard Public Engagement in Government Award for its work.

A 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision upheld the constitutionality of Arizona's commission—with the majority opinion authored by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg—who noted "The people of Arizona turned to the initiative to curb the practice of gerrymandering" and "sought to restore the core principle of republican government, that the voters should choose their representatives, not the other way around."

Sandra Cosgrove, the president of Nevada's League of Women Voters, shares the Notorious RBG's views, saying, "It's time we moved to a fair and inclusive process that creates districts that represent the people of Nevada, not the political ambitions of politicians."

The League will need 97,598 signatures for their initiative to reach your ballot, where it will have to be approved by voters in 2020 and again in 2022 before it takes effect. One of those signatures will be mine. □

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