

July 30, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
H-232
The United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

We, the undersigned groups, strongly urge the House to hold hearings this session on the issues affecting congressional redistricting reform. Two bills and a House Resolution on this important matter have been introduced this Congress: H.R. 543, the Fairness and Independence in Redistricting Act, introduced by Representatives John Tanner (D-TN) and Zack Wamp (R-TN); H.R. 2248, the Redistricting Reform Act of 2007, introduced by Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA); and H.Res. 1365, introduced by Representatives Tanner and Wamp. The bills were referred to the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties more than a year ago.

Both bills seek to fundamentally improve the congressional redistricting process by, among other things, increasing citizen participation, permitting only once a decade redistricting absent a court decision striking down the districts, and by creating independent commissions in the states to conduct congressional redistricting. The H.Res. 1365, introduced on July 22, advocates the use of independent commissions.

A number of our organizations, as well as others from both sides of the political spectrum, have recognized the critical need to reform the process and have founded a new organization, Americans for Redistricting Reform, to raise the profile of the issue and seek solutions. We hope you will support this undertaking.

The post-2000 redistricting cycle saw unprecedented efforts to use the redistricting process purely for partisan purposes. This was done by both parties through extreme gerrymandering in order to create carefully calibrated districts that lacked any serious level of competitiveness in order to protect incumbent officeholders and to gain additional congressional seats for one party or the other. In order to maximize political advantage, some states even resorted to re-redistricting by repeatedly shifting voters among districts in order to weaken the minority political party and shore up the majority's political base. The end result was to still further undermine voter confidence in the integrity of our political process. Our democracy deserves better.

Reform of the redistricting process will bring about more transparency and an expanded role in the process for our citizens. House action is needed to ensure that

competitiveness, accountability and fair representation remain healthy parts of our democratic process. The faith of our citizens in government will be weakened and our democracy undermined if we continue with a system that allows elected officials to choose their constituents, rather than a system where voters choose their elected officials.

It is time for the Congress to hold hearings on the pending bills in order to begin the critically important conversation inside and outside of Congress on potential solutions to fixing the broken redistricting process. H.R. 543 and H.R. 2248 are good starting points for this conversation. Accordingly, we urge you to schedule hearings on redistricting reform.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter that is so critically important to the future of democracy in the United States.

Sincerely,

Americans for Redistricting Reform
Campaign Legal Center
Committee for Economic Development
Common Cause
Council for Excellence in Government
FairVote
Reform Institute
U.S. PIRG

cc:

Representative John Boehner, Minority Leader
Representative Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader
Representative Roy Blunt, Minority Whip
Representative John Conyers, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee
Representative Jerrold Nadler, Chairman of the Subcommittee of the Constitution, Civil
Rights and Civil Liberties of the House Judiciary Committee
Members of the House Judiciary Committee
