

WISCONSIN STATE
LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE HEARING
RECORDS

2005-06

(session year)

Assembly

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

**Committee on
Campaigns &
Elections
(_AC_-CE_)**

File Naming Example:

Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP
> 05hr_AC-Ed_RCP_pt01a
> 05hr_AC-Ed_RCP_pt01b
> 05hr_AC-Ed_RCP_pt02

NOTICES ...

> Committee Hearings ... CH (Public Hearing Announcements)

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> Executive Sessions ... ES

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> Committee Reports ... CR

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> Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

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INFORMATION COLLECTED BY COMMITTEE
CLERK FOR AND AGAINST PROPOSAL

> Appointments ... Appt

> **

Name:

> Clearinghouse Rules ... CRule

**

> Hearing Records ... HR (bills and resolutions)

> 05hr_ajro022_AC-CE_pt01

> Miscellaneous ... Misc

> **

STATE OF WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE
BEFORE THE
ASSEMBLY CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
WISCONSIN ATTORNEY GENERAL PEG LAUTENSCHLAGER
IN THE MATTER OF ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION 22

MAY 26, 2005

I am submitting written testimony today to express my support for 2005 Assembly Joint Resolution 22, relating to directing the Joint Legislative Council to study and recommend legislation providing for redistricting by an independent citizens commission.

While the legislature has focused much attention lately on alleged voter fraud and voter identification issues, not enough attention has been given to Wisconsin's dubious redistricting process and the overwhelming absence of contested elections in legislative races. Currently, the partisan legislature develops Wisconsin's decennial redistricting plans. Without fail, those plans reflect that partisanship and incumbents' interests. As a result, Wisconsin's redistricting plans end up in court at the taxpayers' expense.

In the November 2004 general election in Wisconsin, six of the sixteen (37.5%) State Senate races and 38 of the 99 (38%) State Assembly races were uncontested. Two of the remaining ten Senate races and five of the remaining 61 were not contested by one of the two major parties. All told, in nearly four out of ten legislative races, there was no race at all.

I remain committed to advancing the cause of clean, open and accountable government in Wisconsin. Earlier this year, I unveiled the Attorney General's Government Reform Enterprise (AGGRE), a plan offering several good-government provisions, including a proposal for the creation of a non-partisan redistricting commission. Assembly Joint Resolution 22 is a good step toward restoring responsible government to our state and I urge you to support the resolution.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN

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May 26, 2005

To: Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections

Re: Statement on AJR 41 and AJR 22 from League of Women Voters of Wisconsin

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin strongly supports AJR 41 that proposes amending the State Constitution by adding several additional standards for redistricting Assembly and Senate electoral districts. Currently Constitutional standards for electoral districts include contiguous territory and boundaries that follow county, precinct, town or ward lines. The three other requirements added to these by the amendment are that electoral districts:

- be “as nearly equal in population as possible”;
- be “as politically competitive as practicable”;
- “enable, to the extent practicable, the election of an Assembly that is reflective of the racial” diversity of the state as a whole.

The League of Women Voters’ support for prompt reapportionment of electoral districts based on “one person, one vote”, has a history going back to the 1930s. League has advocated for legislative districts of roughly equal population on the national, state, and local government levels. This population standard is the best way to give equal value to each person’s vote – surely a hallmark of a democracy.

On several occasions, the League of Women Voters has objected to the gerrymandering of districts to give advantage to whichever political party is in power. League also has opposed legislation that would dilute minority representation, and therefore we support the objectives of the second and third standards added by the proposed amendment.

League also applauds the initiative of directing the Joint Legislative Council to study and recommend setting up an independent commission to redistrict state legislative and Congressional districts after each 10-year census, as proposed in AJR 22. This reform is another long-sponsored League priority. League believes that an independent commission, composed of citizens with some representation from the legislature, is the best means of providing Wisconsin with a balanced, effective redistricting body.

We urge you to recommend passage of both these bills.



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Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections in Support of AJR 22 and AJR 41 Relating to Redistricting

Thursday, May 26, 2005

The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign appreciates this opportunity to testify in support of both AJR 22 and AJR 41, proposals to reform legislative redistricting. Reforming our redistricting process is vital to rebuilding our democracy in Wisconsin. It is our belief that establishing legal standards for drawing voting districts and putting the task in the hands of an independent authority are not mutually exclusive. The two proposals together would create competitive elections and work to end the extreme partisanship in our state Legislature.

In a real democracy voters should choose their representatives, not the other way around. Both proposals represent positive steps in the direction of that ideal, and both deserve support.

The Problem

Currently, partisan leaders use sophisticated computerized mapping to handpick their voters. The crassly political way district maps are drawn favors current office holders by creating districts where voters favoring them outnumber voters loyal to the opposition. This is done by either concentrating the voting power of the opposition into just a few districts or diluting the opposition's voting power across many districts. Today, modern technology has lent new precision to the art of redistricting - and taken gerrymandering to new lows.

Rearranging legislative districts to favor the party in power is lethal to our representative democracy. It reduces the number of competitive elections, increases voter cynicism, turns-off potential new candidates, and increases partisan extremism in our state Legislature.

Most of the concerns generated by the current redistricting process address the resulting epidemic of uncontested state legislative races. In the 2004 November Elections, 2.2 million voters in Wisconsin had no choice for their representative in at least one house of our state Legislature...that's 2.2 million out of roughly 4 million. Of the 132 seats in the Wisconsin Legislature, fewer than 20 are now truly competitive. Public awareness of how little say citizens have in who represents them in the Legislature is a recipe for voter cynicism. We experience less accountability from our elected officials in "safe districts" for they no longer fear the voters. Legislators' doors are closing to those who do not fully agree with their positions. Lopsided districts demoralize voters and make it harder to get fresh blood and new ideas into the Legislature.

One largely untold story behind gerrymandering of voting districts is the resulting polarization of politics. A byproduct of partisan gerrymandering is candidates who appeal to just one side. Squeezed out are candidates who appeal to moderates or independents. Partisan extremism produces a Legislature heavy on ideologues and light on pragmatists. There is more

demagoguery and less compromise or problem solving. As one recently retired state representative remarked about the climate he was leaving behind: "As a community of politicians, we've created this situation where we're sniveling, backbiting, partisan hacks. So we don't get a very good pool of statesmen or lawmakers." We now have a Legislature with fewer members willing to deliberate, let alone compromise, to get the public's business done.

The Solution

There is an antidote for the partisan extremism and demagoguery that one-sided districts promote – a redistricting process such as that in neighboring Iowa. We can have more competitive elections and more civility among lawmakers by ending partisan gerrymandering of districts and creating an independent commission in charge of drawing voting districts. The legal mandates in AJR 41 strengthen the process by which such districts are kept competitive and politically viable.

Iowa's nonpartisan Legislative Services Bureau redraws the districts using four criteria – equal population, contiguity, unity of counties and cities and compactness in descending order. By law, the Bureau must ignore such factors as political affiliation, previous election results, the addresses of incumbents, or any demographic information other than population in creating the redistricting proposals. Not coincidentally, races for all five of Iowa's U.S. House seats are competitive, the only state that can make that claim. Wisconsin, by contrast, cannot lay claim to a single truly competitive House district.

If Wisconsin wants a democracy worthy of the name, a way needs to be found to curb the excesses of partisan redistricting. We don't have to look far to find proven models capable of producing more competitive elections and more partisan cooperation. All who are interested in empowering voters and restoring competitive elections should keep debate away from which proposal is best and instead support passage of both Assembly Joint Resolution 22 and Assembly Joint Resolution 41.

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**ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS
HEARING ON AB 289, AJR22 & AJR 41**

May 26, 2005

I am Herman Holtzman, and I represent myself.

Regarding AB 289, I support the part of banning contributions but would like to expand the ban to all the time the legislators are in office. Allowing contributions before and after legislative sessions could result in either bribes or pay-offs.

Legislators are involved in creating legislation, co-sponsoring bills, conducting hearings, studying bills, and offering amendments before and after legislative floor sessions. Contributions during this period could certainly affect legislation and should be banned.

Regarding AJR 22 and AJR 41, I support the concept but I think implementation is most difficult if not impossible. It means that any idea of fairness in elections is a minimum of six years away. Redistricting with regard to only population should not be a problem. I would volunteer to do it with my slide rule that I got in 1946 from the VA while enrolled in Civil Engineering at the University of Wisconsin under the GI Bill. Political competitiveness and racial diversity would be hard to achieve.

Even if these resolutions became law and there was an agreement on redistricting, elections would still not be fair. I think that as long as candidates have to depend on money to get elected, they cannot be independent. They have to vote the party line, even if it is not for the benefit of the people. If they don't, they could face a financially strong challenger in the next primary and general election.

Of the six members on this committee, three faced no challenger in the primary and general election, two faced no primary opposition but did have a challenger in the general election. One had a contested primary for an open seat and only token opposition in the general election.

In the 2004 Assembly election, 66 incumbents did not face a primary challenge, only 19 incumbents faced a primary challenge and 14 districts had challengers for the open seats.

It is obvious the current system is not working and will not work after redistricting unless there are competitive races in all districts. This can only be achieved by providing full public funding now that will include one third of the funds for primary elections.

A comprehensive finance campaign reform Bill calling for full public funding will be introduced in the near future. I hope you and your colleagues will support this Bill. Attached is an information sheet providing reasons for supporting full public funding of elections