

**House State Government Committee
Informational Meeting**

**Committee of Seventy
Written Comments on Redistricting
August 16, 2016**

American politics is at a crossroads because people's trust in government is at historic lows. During the Eisenhower and Kennedy years, the American National Election Study found three quarters of the country trusted government always or most of the time. Today, only a quarter of the public have such trust, and confidence in Congress is in the single digits. The fierce, negative hyper-partisan 2016 presidential election will only drive those numbers down.

The erosion of trust in the system and in our political leadership is driven by many and complex causes. Global economic shifts have sent jobs elsewhere and replaced them with bitterness and anxiety. Pennsylvania, in particular, has suffered more than most. To compound the challenge, a fragmented media landscape has isolated voters with incomplete perspectives of what's happening on cable news, talk radio and their Facebook walls.

But we have to consider what's within our power to change and what's a further reach. One thing we can affect is the way we've chosen to construct our political and electoral systems – these we can change. The redistricting process may be the most powerful lever we have available to begin bringing this commonwealth back together.

The common lamentation of redistricting is that it's political, and that politics must be removed altogether to achieve fair, competitive districts. Obviously, a full divorce is impossible. The process is inherently political, but we can make it less partisan. We can and must do better.

The current system for drawing congressional and state legislative boundaries in Pennsylvania is far too prone to meddling by whichever major party controls the legislature following the census. Other states have experienced the same problem. In North Carolina, the GOP-controlled legislature drew lines that are now headed to the US Supreme Court. In Maryland, Democrats are responsible for gerrymandering.

Pennsylvania's redistricting process hasn't thrown our elections into chaos as it has recently in North Carolina, but our lines are no less problematic. Our surgically-drawn boundaries create ink blot-shaped districts that defy credibility, trust, and logic. Further, the partisan two-party process that draws the maps excludes one million unaffiliated and third party voters, many of whom are drawn from our growing Millennial population. Who's looking out for them?



The Committee of Seventy strongly supports a redistricting process that's fair and transparent—a process that will help restore trust in our government and elected officials. We urge you and your colleagues to consider creating an independent redistricting commission, in which an independent commission of citizens is responsible, with public input and due oversight, for drafting the maps for congressional and state legislative districts. In our view, an independent commission as used in California and other states is the gold standard for fair and effective redistricting. To adopt a similar model in Pennsylvania would be an enormous leap forward, signaling to voters and the rest of the country that we're serious about governing.

There was a time, not too long ago, but certainly when my father Dick Thornburgh served as Governor, when the political culture of Pennsylvania was marked by a spirit of moderation that created opportunities to reach the political consensus necessary to make tough decisions on issues that affect Pennsylvanians. We desperately need to revive that spirit, and more compact and coherent districts, drawn by a less partisan process, can help get us there. The informational meeting held today is the time to begin this discussion in earnest before the next legislative session opens in 2017.

As one of the oldest independent and nonpartisan advocates for better government in the country, Seventy looks forward to working with you on this issue. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comment.

David Thornburgh

President and CEO

The Committee of Seventy