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Statement on Campaign for Redistricting Reform

Seventy deplores Harrisburg's cynical, partisan inaction; urges frustrated voters not to give up on the fight for a better way

HARRISBURG, PA – With the General Assembly adjourning for the summer, it will take extraordinary steps to meet the deadline for creating, by constitutional amendment, a new citizens commission to draw both the congressional and state legislative maps following the 2020 Census.

The nonpartisan Committee of Seventy shares the frustration felt by scores of advocacy organizations and tens of thousands of citizen activists as they watch lawmakers let this opportunity slip away.

“Our legislative leadership let us down. The citizens of Pennsylvania have a right to expect more. Pennsylvanians expressed their support for true reform, and that resulted in a series of bills that enjoyed widespread bipartisan support among rank and file lawmakers,” stated CEO David Thornburgh. “The will of the people was rebuffed by the same cynical, partisan interests that this reform was intended to check. That’s discouraging, but we intend to redouble our efforts to keep this issue alive and find other paths to reform.”

The Committee of Seventy applauds Fair Districts PA, Common Cause, the League of Women Voters and other organizations for their tireless work to flag the dangers of gerrymandering and to seek fixes to this rigged system. This movement has been an inspiring example of voter education and mobilization, springing up from the grassroots.

A number of lawmakers also deserve credit for their attempts to advance legislation through good-faith negotiation and bipartisan compromise. Senators Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon) and Anthony Williams (D-Philadelphia) and several of their Senate colleagues, in particular, considered hours of public testimony and discussion. In the House, Representatives Steve Samuelson (D-Northampton) and Eric Roe (R-Chester) led the effort to draw maps through a more independent process.

There Are Still Paths to Redistricting Reform

It’s important for voters disappointed by Harrisburg’s failure to act in the last month to recognize: This is not the end of the story, not by a long shot. First, recall that the Pennsylvania Constitution dictates only the process for drawing the state legislative maps. A constitutional amendment is not required to improve the congressional redistricting process that has caused such public concern in Pennsylvania. Plenty of time remains to make those reforms by statute. Such reform would not have constitutional permanency but



could be enacted in the next legislative session. Given the partisan overreach perpetrated in 2011 that made Pennsylvania a national emblem of out-of-control gerrymandering, fixing the congressional map-drawing process remains critical and urgent.

Additionally, the workings of the five-member Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC) set up by the state constitution to draw state districts can also be improved by statute – to ensure greater openness, public input and time for deliberation.

Draw the Lines-PA Launching Statewide

Even as the General Assembly disappoints voters, the Committee of Seventy is launching a massive effort to inspire those same voters to stay engaged in the redistricting issue. Starting in the fall of 2018, and backed by over \$1 million in support from Pennsylvania foundations, **Draw the Lines-PA**, a nonpartisan citizen-engagement initiative, will put the same digital tools used by political professionals into the hands of Pennsylvania’s voters and students. Working together, citizens can participate in regional and state competitions to produce better maps and a renewed sense of civic engagement among Pennsylvanians.

“In addition to creating a rich collection of public data and quality maps to consider in 2021, Draw the Lines will demonstrate powerfully how much better a citizen-driven process could work,” said Project Director Chris Satullo. “People should hold the pen, not politicians.”

The first competition will launch across the Commonwealth this September with a congressional mapping competition. New contests, including state Senate and House districts, will engage fresh citizen mapmakers each spring and fall until Pennsylvania has a new set of maps in 2021. Draw the Lines will come to all corners of the Commonwealth. For more info, visit: drawthelinespa.org.

Unrigging The System and Moderating our Politics

Voters across the Commonwealth and political spectrum are concerned that our political system is broken; or if not broken, is fixed--as in rigged. Crooked political boundaries for partisan or incumbent advantage are just one symptom. Meanwhile, money continues to flow unimpeded into elections, especially in Pennsylvania where campaign finance rules and enforcement are weak. And an enormous portion of the electorate remains shut out of primary elections, where candidates are moving farther to the left or right to cater to increasingly partisan primary voters.

A [June 2018 Franklin & Marshall poll](#) confirms this sentiment in the Commonwealth: Three of four registered voters currently “believe state government needs reform, with large majorities favoring reforms to campaign finance laws, the structure and operation of the state legislature, redistricting, and state and local government financing.”

The good news is that real solutions are possible.

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The Committee of Seventy is an independent nonprofit advocate for better politics and better government in Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For more information, see www.seventy.org.