

August 21, 2009

The Honorable John Conyers
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lamar Smith
House Judiciary Committee
2142 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Conyers and Ranking Member Smith:

We, the undersigned groups, strongly urge you to hold hearings this fall on the issues affecting congressional redistricting reform.

Earlier this summer, a bipartisan group of Members introduced H.R. 3025, the Fairness and Independence in Redistricting Act. The bill seeks to fundamentally improve the congressional redistricting process by, among other things, 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.

As you know, the post-2000 redistricting cycle saw unprecedented efforts to use the redistricting process purely for partisan purposes. This was done through severe gerrymandering, and the creation of districts that lacked any serious level of competitiveness, as districts were carefully calibrated to protect the powerbase of incumbent officeholders and marginalize their political opponents. When necessary to maximize their 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 effect of all this was a clear undermining of democracy and voter confidence in the integrity of our political process. In short, the redistricting process became an effective tool for making a highly partisan power grab.

House action is needed to ensure that competitiveness, accountability and fair representation remain healthy parts of our democratic process, and to keep the overly partisan and unchecked redistricting process from spinning out of control. Our nation will be irretrievably weakened if we continue with a system that undermines our representative democracy by allowing elected officials to choose their constituents, rather than a system where voters choose their elected officials.

It is time for the Judiciary Committee to hold hearings as a means of starting the critical conversation inside and outside of Congress on potential solutions to fixing the broken redistricting process. Although some of our individual organizations may not necessarily agree with all of H.R. 3025's provisions, we do agree that the legislation is a good starting point for this important 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,

Campaign Legal Center
Committee for Economic Development
Common Cause
FairVote
iSolon
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
National Taxpayers Union
Public Citizen
U.S. PIRG

Cc: Full Judiciary Committee