

VIRGINIA REDISTRICTING COALITION

1716 East Franklin Street, Richmond, VA 23223

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Doug Smith

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804-643-2474

COALITION APPLAUDS GOVERNOR'S ACTION ON BIPARTISAN REDISTRICTING

The Virginia Redistricting Coalition today applauded Gov. Bob McDonnell's establishment and appointment of an Independent Bipartisan Commission on Redistricting.

"We have supported and worked for bipartisan redistricting in Virginia for years. The Governor's action is recognition that citizens of the Commonwealth want fair, nonpartisan political districts," said Doug Smith, executive director of the Virginia Interfaith Center, who serves as leader of the Coalition.

"The Coalition believes the Governor's action is a first step toward a truly bipartisan process as now used in a growing number of states," Smith said.

The Virginia Redistricting Coalition brings together major statewide organizations, including AARP Virginia, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, League of Women Voters, Virginia League of Conservation Voters, the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Virginia 21 and local organizations such as the Future of Hampton Roads, Richmond First Club and the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce.

The Coalition is supported by political leaders such as Sen. Mark Warner, former Gov. Linwood Holton and former Sen. George Allen and by business leaders across Virginia.

Gov. McDonnell established the advisory commission through executive order to create and review proposed redistricting plans for the House of Delegates, the state Senate and Virginia's 11 seats in Congress.

Among the criteria the Independent Bipartisan Commission must use as a guide are whether districts are contiguous and compact, meet the Voting Rights Act of 1965, limit the number of counties and cities divided among districts, and preserve communities of interest. The Commission will certify plans that meet these and other redistricting criteria to the General Assembly for consideration.

From its outset three years ago, the Virginia Redistricting Coalition has sought change that will encourage more candidates to seek public office, end the practice of primaries being the only opportunity for voters to choose a candidate and return to the Constitution-ordered practice of fair representation of all citizens. The Coalition moved into high gear as this year's deadline approached for the legislative redistricting based on Census figures that will be released in February. Proposals were made to the Governor to encourage and assist him in establishing a bipartisan commission.

"We are especially pleased with the caliber of the governor's appointees to the commission," Smith said. Noting that the Commission membership includes an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, two former judges and an independent chairman, the Coalition expressed its belief that the Commission will introduce a new level of fairness to redistricting in Virginia.

"Gov. McDonnell deserves a great deal of credit for taking this step that is politically risky, based on the members of the General Assembly who have refused to allow legislation to pass that would have established a bipartisan approach to redistricting years ago," Smith said.

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