

## **From the Virginia Redistricting Coalition**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, February 24, 2012

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## **Vote on Monday could be last chance for Bipartisan Anti-Gerrymandering Bill**

**RICHMOND, Feb. 24** – The non-partisan Virginia Redistricting Coalition called on the House of Delegates to pass the bipartisan bill that would create an independent commission to prepare new political districts for Virginia in 2021. Passed unanimously by the Senate, SB446 is stalled in a House subcommittee.

“This crucial bipartisan reform can’t be allowed to fade away in a subcommittee,” said Lynn Gordon, president of the League of Women Voters of Virginia and co-chair of the Virginia Redistricting Coalition. “Last year’s redistricting showed that the current law allows delegates and senators to be more concerned about protecting incumbents than giving citizens a fair, independent process that allows voters a real choice.”

On Monday, the Constitutional Amendments Subcommittee of the House Privileges & Elections Committee is set to take up SB446. The subcommittee meets at 8 a.m. in the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor West Conference Room in the General Assembly Building.

Sponsored by Sen. Jill Vogel, R-Winchester, and incorporating a similar proposal by Sen. John Miller, D-Newport News, SB446 would establish a 7-member commission to redraw state and congressional legislative districts after the 2020 Census. One member each would be appointed by the majority leaders and minority leaders in the Senate and House and the chairmen of the two political parties winning the most votes in the previous gubernatorial election. The seventh member (and chairman) would be appointed by those six members, with deadlocks decided by the state Supreme Court. The bill would limit the use of political data to draw the districts and require opportunities for public comment. The commission would submit its proposal to the General Assembly, which would take it up in the normal legislative process.

Redistricting Coalition co-chair John Stone of Future of Hampton Roads pointed to the high number of uncontested races after political districts were redrawn last year as evidence that gerrymandering eliminated voters’ choice by eliminating competition. Of the 100 House seats up for election in 2011, 63 were uncontested; in just 7 races was the margin of victory 10 percent or less. Of the 40 Senate seats, 14 (35 percent) were uncontested.

“How is this being accountable to the people?” Stone asked. “Some members of the General Assembly have lost sight of the fact that their legislative seats are not theirs. They belong to the people of Virginia.”

Stone said the lack of competition spills into governing. “The partisan manner in which the redistricting process is currently done results in safe seats dominated by the hyperpartisan fringes of both parties,” he said. “That means reluctance or refusal to compromise and a failure to address important issues. Partisan deadlock in government is largely attributable to our faulty redistricting system.”

Five anti-gerrymandering bills were introduced in the 2012 General Assembly. Only SB446 remains.

“Sen. Vogel’s bill is the last chance in this session to take the partisan fix out of elections and put fairness back in,” Gordon said. “Voters want elections to be a meaningful choice, based on a balanced discussion of the issues, but that cannot occur when one party or the other strongly dominates a particular district.”

The Virginia Redistricting Coalition is a non-partisan, statewide group of organizations and individuals who advocate bipartisan redistricting reform.

Active Coalition leadership comes from member organizations, including the League of Women Voters, AARP of Virginia, Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, Greater Norfolk Corporation, Virginia Business Council, Virginia League of Conservation Voters, Future of Hampton Roads, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Virginia Organizing and Richmond First Club. Individually, citizens, business leaders, elected leaders and former state elected leaders joined the Coalition effort to obtain fair, nonpartisan redistricting that would contribute to improved representation and better government in Virginia.

For more information, go to [www.fixthelines.com](http://www.fixthelines.com).

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## **Editorial support**

### **Diverse Virginia editorial pages support Vogel Redistricting Commission Bill**

#### **Richmond Times-Dispatch editorial, Feb. 18:**

*A unanimous Senate has passed Republican Jill Vogel's bill to establish a bipartisan redistricting commission. Gerrymandering distorted the results in last year's elections for the Senate and House of Delegates. The commonwealth cannot wait until the last minute to enact reforms. A bipartisan commission would be a step in the right direction. An independent process would be the preferred solution. The GOP-dominated House should follow the Senate's enlightened example.*

Link: <http://www2.timesdispatch.com/news/rtd-opinion/2012/feb/18/tdopin01-wrap-up-ar-1697751/>

#### **Washington Post editorial, Feb.17:**

*Now there is another glimmer of hope. The state Senate, whose 40 seats are evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, unanimously passed legislation to create a bipartisan redistricting commission. The seven-member commission, which would exclude officeholders, would consist of three Democrats, three Republicans and a seventh member, the chairman, selected by the other six.*

*True, the commission's clout would be limited. Its recommended electoral map would be submitted to the General Assembly, which would still have the final say. But that, at least, amounts to constructive coercion that might shame some incumbents into considering the state's welfare, not just their own.*

*Unfortunately, the Senate plan is going nowhere in the House, thanks to self-interested pols who like the old way of doing business — and to Mr. McDonnell, who, notwithstanding his conversion as a candidate, can't muster the political spine to endorse it.*

Link: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/virginia-loves-its-sham-democracy/2012/02/07/gIQAQIdaIR\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/virginia-loves-its-sham-democracy/2012/02/07/gIQAQIdaIR_story.html)

#### **Lynchburg News and Advance editorial, Feb. 23:**

*This year, Sen. Jill Holtzman Vogel, R-Winchester, and Sen. John C. Miller, D-Newport News, introduced SB 446, legislation to create a bipartisan redistricting committee for future elections. Seven members, no officeholders, three Democrats, three Republicans and a chairman selected by the remaining six.*

*The Assembly itself would have final say as to the approval of the districts — not good, in our opinion — but still better than the farce we have now.*

Link: <http://www2.newsadvance.com/news/2012/feb/19/virginia-democracy-incumbents-dream-ar-1697596/>