

LWVO State House Day – March 7, 2017

Ann Henkener, Redistricting Specialist

In November of 2015, Ohio voters resoundingly (over 71% “yes” vote) approved Issue 1, reforming Ohio’s process for redistricting the General Assembly, effective in 2021. Leaguers all over Ohio helped spread the word, and voters followed our lead. Unfortunately, the proposal didn’t include reforming the way Ohio draws lines for its Congressional districts.

Currently Congressional districts are drawn by the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate in a bill, subject to a veto by the Governor. If there is a gubernatorial veto, the legislature can override it by a 60% majority vote in both houses. This process has produced partisan gerrymanders, favoring the party drawing the lines. Currently the lines are being drawn by the Republicans, and Ohio, whose voters are almost evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, is represented by 12 Republicans and 4 Democrats. Clearly a masterful job of redistricting!

The Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission’s committee on the legislative and executive branches has been examining Congressional redistricting reform for the past year. It was the testimony before that body that provided the ground work for the reform in 2015 for General Assembly districts and we had hoped the same would happen with Congressional redistricting. Certainly the best and easiest route to reform is to again have bipartisan consensus and have the legislature place the issue on the ballot. Efforts have stalled but we will continue working with the Modernization Commission and individual members of the legislature to advance the possibilities of reform. But we are also going to have to seriously look at the more difficult route – an initiative petition drive. We are certainly hoping for the best – a bipartisan agreement – but preparing for the alternative.

TO DO: Share with your Ohio Representative, Ohio Senator, and Congressional Representative your concern that the voters of Ohio aren’t being fairly represented under the current system of drawing Congressional districts. Encourage them to support redistricting reform that will be transparent, fair to voters of all political parties, produce districts that make sense geographically, and give voters a fair choice in the general election.