

## Redistricting legislation bill to become law

Written by By Mike Daly Guest Columnist  
Friday, 02 April 2021 06:43

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Last week I reported that this legislation was doomed. I was absolutely wrong. After a few deletions from the original proposal by the New Mexico First Workshop, it passed in both houses of the legislature with a large majority. This is probably due to heavy lobbying of our representatives by members of the 50+ organizations that supported the legislation.

New Mexico First and Common Cause New Mexico seemed to take the lead in this effort. Below is the well written press release from New Mexico First. Of course, the governor must sign the legislation before it can become law. If you feel strongly about this issue you can Google her office and email a message

“After a whirlwind round of last-minute amendments, the New Mexico Redistricting Act cleared the state legislature on March 20. With almost all of the elements that were previously in SB 15 amended into SB 304, the broader election bill passed the Senate Floor by unanimous consent, in the final two hours of the 2021 Legislative Session.

The redistricting portions of the bill establish a cross-partisan, seven-member Citizens Redistricting Committee to gather public input and draft new voting boundaries for the legislature’s consideration. This change represents the first time in New Mexico’s history that the maps will be drafted by a group other than the legislature. This change will also expand the role of voters through multiple public meetings throughout the state.

Further, the bill establishes far more rigorous criteria for the development of those maps than New Mexico has ever had, including:

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Limits on the use of partisan data.

Limits on use of incumbents' addresses in the map-drawing process.

Explicit inclusion of the boundaries of tribes, nations and pueblos among the boundaries to be recognized in the map-drawing process.

Expanded requirements for county clerks and election officials to work with tribal officials during the precinct-drawing process that is currently underway and will continue through the fall.

Allowance of the use of multiple credible data sources in addition to the U.S. Census.

"Fundamentally, this bill – soon to be law – is ground-breaking for New Mexico," Ed Chavez, Redistricting Task Force co-chair and retired Chief Justice of the N.M. Supreme Court, said. "This will be the first time that a citizen group will drive the process instead of lawmakers. The public's participation will help ensure that, in the long-term, voters have a fair and equal opportunity to select representatives of their choice," the press release concluded.

However, the bill does not include an allowance for split precincts, a reform that was particularly advocated by the Navajo Nation. It is also weaker than similar legislation (HB211) that would have disallowed the legislature from amending the maps developed by the Citizens Redistricting Committee. Consequently, all eyes will be on the tribal inclusion reforms to determine how well indigenous communities of interest are preserved, as well as how closely lawmakers ultimately adhere to the new, less partisan, principles.

The reforms were advocated by a large, cross-partisan coalition of organizations and individuals that advanced the simple notion: "Voters should select their lawmakers; lawmakers should not select their constituents."

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