

Update on New Mexico Voting Districts

Written by By Mike Daly Guest Columnist
Friday, 19 November 2021 09:30



There's still time to be heard on Redistricting

The New Mexico Redistricting Committee has filed its final report with the New Mexico Legislature and is asking voters to encourage state representatives to follow the Committee's recommendations.

Background: Every ten years, after the Census, voting districts are realigned for equal voter representation. Redistricting is the process of redrawing the geographical boundaries that correspond to certain elected offices to account for changes in population. This is done by the state legislature and of course that means politics rule. In establishing the Redistricting Committee, the Legislature voted to have a more representative group lay out boundary options. Of course, now the legislature will still have the final word, but the people have spoken, so to speak.

The Committee included two Democrats and two Republicans and two unaffiliated voters with the committee chairman chosen by the N.M. Ethics Commission. The chairman by law needs to be a retired N.M. State Supreme Court Justice or Court of Appeals Justice. The political parties chose their representatives. The Ethics Commission also appointed the two unaffiliated voters who were selected from 69 applications.

Process: All the meetings were on Zoom, which allowed statewide participation by the public and there was extensive participation as a result. The Committee did its best to eliminate gerrymandering in the choices. Gerrymandering is the method by which the political party in power adjusts the voting district boundaries to benefit the party, not the public.

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It was the public that participated in the meetings that determined their communities of interest for which they were advocating. The maps were very responsive to input by the public members.

Native American Participation: There were no Native Americans on the Committee. This is because all of the Native American applicants were associated with a political party. But on the other hand, there was extensive Native American participation in the Zoom meetings resulting in very strong representation by this group. The committee reached out to map makers to honor tribal boundaries and now they do according to the Committee.

We can now view all the alternatives. This is the location of the Redistricting Committee map alternatives: <https://www.nmredistricting.org/mapconcepts/>. Redistricting is now in the hands of the legislature which will meet on or about Dec. 6 to discuss and choose the final boundaries.

In addition to the map concepts themselves, the Redistricting Committee has sent a strong request to the legislature, asking:

- A. If the legislature amends the maps sent to them by the Citizens Redistricting Committee, they should provide a detailed explanation of why they amended the maps,
- B. During the Special Session on redistricting all legislating meetings should follow the letter and spirit of the Open Meetings Act, the Sunshine Law. The public's business should be conducted in public.
- C. That they select the CRC map that best balances:
 - a. Compliance with the Voting Rights Act
 - b. Is free of partisan gerrymandering

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- c. Protects communities of interest
- d. Respects governmental boundaries including tribal boundaries
- e. Does not favor incumbents

At a Zoom meeting update the Redistricting Committee said that as of Nov. 4, they have 50,000 people supporting their map choices. The Committee selected three options for U.S. Congressional, State Senate and House Districts and Public Education Commission Districts with the hope that the legislature will choose one of these options with little or no change.

Since redistricting can very strongly affect certain members who will find their district now less partisan than before, or who are now sharing a district with another legislator if they adopt one of the maps, this gets to be very personal. One legislator said that the last redistricting that took place in 2011 was a fight similar to the TV series "The Hunger Games." So legislators will want to be fair and responsive as long as it does not affect them negatively and of course this process is likely to do just that. So the Committee has asked the public to be sure to contact their representatives and ask that they address fairness and transparency and also respect what the public has said, as well as recognizing the fact that the Committee's work was done in a very transparent manner.

By Mike Daly
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