

Toni Saldivar, "The League Looks at Redistricting: Can voters make redistricting fair?" *The Oxford Press*. 13 September 2015: A3.

Ohio voters have a very important election coming up in November, yes, this November. Don't think about 2016... yet. Think about the opportunity Ohio voters have this year to make a historic change in the way their voting districts are drawn and thus begin to end the anti-democratic practice called "gerrymandering."

Back in 1812, the then governor of Massachusetts, Ellbridge Gerry, approved new voting districts in his state that manipulated the boundaries in such a way as to favor his party and thus to keep it in power. One district's shape was indeed odd: it looked like a huge dragon or salamander. The Boston press was quick to coin the term "Gerrymander" to name this unfair practice of drawing voting districts. The name has endured but so has the unfair practice. It seems that politicians just cannot resist manipulating voting districts when they have the opportunity to do so.

As most voters know, a federal census is taken every ten years, and every ten years states are required to establish their voting districts based on the new data. That sounds fair, but the political party in power when the federal census is taken has traditionally used their power to draw district boundaries to keep themselves in power-- by "gerrymandering."

The Ohio General Assembly responded last year to Ohio voters' concerns over the secretive and unfair redistricting process that went on behind closed doors in 2011, after the last federal census in 2010. Many Ohio citizens had had enough of the "winner takes all" system. In late 2014, the Ohio Assembly passed bipartisan legislation that would assign district mapping for state representatives to a bipartisan group. Voters will be asked in November to accept or reject the new system as an amendment to the Ohio State Constitution.

The politicians involved in the unfair redistricting of 2011 broke no law because the Ohio State Constitution as it now stands allows one political party to draw Ohio voting district maps to their advantage, and without public scrutiny. To end this practice, The Ohio Assembly, in a bipartisan effort led by Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican, and Vernon Sykes, an Akron Democrat, passed legislation late last year to give Ohio voters the opportunity to create a bipartisan reapportionment (redistricting) plan. Voters will see this plan on the November Ballot as Issue No. 1.

Ballot Issue No. 1 deals with state districts only, but this is a step in the right direction. The next step would be to implement a bipartisan plan for fairly mapping U.S. Congressional Districts in Ohio. Voters in many states, not just in Ohio, are demanding an end to partisan manipulation of their voting districts. Voters in Arizona were so fed up with gerrymandering by their state legislature that they took the redistricting task out of its control. Voters launched a ballot initiative that set up an independent commission for reapportionment. The Arizona legislature filed a

court case saying only they--the elected legislators-- could legally determine voting district boundaries. The case went eventually all the way to the Supreme Court.

In June, the Supreme Court upheld the right of Arizona voters to make a law through a ballot initiative to end one-party control of redistricting. The Supreme Court decided in favor of "voters choosing their representatives, not the other way around." In other words, the Supreme Court upheld Arizona voters' right to a redistricting commission independent of the state legislature for drawing fair federal voting districts and for ending gerrymandering.

This Supreme Court decision should give impetus to the bipartisan proposal led by Ohio State Senators Frank LaRose, a Copley Township Republican, and Tom Sawyer, an Akron Democrat. According to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, their plan for U. S. Congressional districts "would assign district-drawing to a seven member commission, including the governor, auditor and secretary of state, and four other panelists, two per party." Ohio voters may have the opportunity to vote on that plan in the 2016 election.

Because every voter wants his or her vote to count, every voter should support efforts to establish fairly determined voting districts. Ohio voters can learn more about Ballot Issue No. 1 on the November 2015 ballot at a public forum September 29, at 7:30 PM in the LCNB Community Room on Park Place in Oxford, sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Oxford.

League of Women Voters of Oxford Public Forum:

"What Redistricting Means for Democracy."

Sept. 19, 2015      7:30 PM      LCNB Community Room, Park Place, Oxford

Speaker: Ann Henkener, J.D. of the League of Women Voters of Ohio.

Ms. Henkener will explain and lead a discussion on Ballot Issue No. 1, the proposed law that would establish a new bipartisan system of redistricting in Ohio. Ballot issue No. 1 has the support of many organizations, including the Ohio Republican Party, The League of Women Voters of Ohio, the Coalition of Democratic and Progressive Organizations of Central Ohio, the Ohio State Bar Association, Common Cause, Ohio Farmers Union, and Ohio Chamber of Commerce.