



# Candi Walz, chair, and Sedric McClure, member, Minnesota Citizens Redistricting Commission

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle #920, Bloomington, MN 55437

*December 2, 2011*

## **Notes of the discussion**

**Present :** Verne Johnson (chair, phone), Dan Loritz (vice chair), David Broden, Janis Clay, Pat Davies, Paul Gilje, Sallie Kemper, Tim McDonald, Clarence Shallbetter

**Summary of discussion :** Two members of the Citizens Redistricting Commission (CRC) organized by the non-profit organization Draw the Line Minnesota argue that the Legislature is in an impaired position to redraw the boundaries of electoral districts. Political polarization and partisanship have contributed to a redistricting process that is not in citizens' best interests and inevitably ends up in the court system for a solution.

They advocate instead involving a broad array of citizens in the process and disallowing the inherent conflict of interest in incumbent legislators' drawing the lines of the districts in which they will run. They call for districts that are more representative of characteristics of the state's population and that are drawn by the people living in those districts. Using this process they have developed a redistricting proposal that they have presented to the judicial panel now in charge of redrawing district boundaries. They hope the process they have undertaken this year will prove to be a model for redistricting reform after the next Census is taken in 2020.

**A. Welcome and introductions - Candi Walz** is an adjunct professor of political science at Century College and owner of Let's Talk Kids, LLC. She has been a state capitol reporter and worked in government relations for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and for the Minnesota State College Student Association.

**Sedric McClure** is a multicultural counselor in Student and Academic Affairs at Macalester College and has worked in multicultural settings in higher education for fifteen years.

The **Minnesota Citizens Redistricting Commission** is a project of Draw the Line Minnesota, an initiative of the Midwest Democracy Network. There are four members of the network: Common Cause Minnesota, League of Women Voters Minnesota, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, and Take Action Minnesota.

Upon completion of the 2010 census, as the redistricting process began, the member groups of Draw the Line Minnesota identified a need to engage citizens in the process of redrawing district lines. They created the Citizens Redistricting Commission and called for nominations and appointments. A person could self-nominate but had to have a recommendation.

Commission members are identified here: <http://bit.ly/rRE3mQ>

The commission's final report, including a copy of the map may be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/6tyxtfw> .

**B. Background** —In 2011 the DFL Governor vetoed a bill enacted by the GOP Legislature redrawing legislative and congressional districts to be effective with elections in 2012. Redistricting is required every 10 years following the decennial census. In light of the inability of the Governor and Legislature to agree, the Minnesota Supreme Court, upon petition from citizens, assigned a five-person judicial panel to redraw boundaries. The court's redistricting plan is expected in February. The Walz-McClure commission submitted its plan to the judicial panel.

In 2008 the Civic Caucus recommended that a commission be established by law to redraw legislative and congressional districts. See: <http://bit.ly/ad4sl8>

### **C. Discussion -**

#### **THE PROBLEM: The redistricting process is partisan and results in deficient representation.**

Walz said that as a political science professor she asks her students each week to tackle a state problem and act as a committee to propose a possible solution. The problem here is that for decades the Legislature and governor have not been able to agree on a redistricting plan. Instead the process is polarized, very political, and does not lead to accurate representation in the legislature of the diversity of Minnesota. Nor does the process involve perspective of citizens outside the Legislature. For these reasons it is not an effective process, the speakers said, and, for the past four decades, has resulted in the intervention of the court system.

#### **THE GOAL: The redistricting process needs to be more inclusive and result in better representation.**

McClure said that the goal of Draw the Line Minnesota is to have the redistricting process work for more of the people of Minnesota. They believe that priority should be placed on two key goals: first, focus on ensuring that district maps represent all communities of interest, not just those within political boundaries (e.g. cities and counties); and, second, demonstrate that citizens can and should play a substantive role in Minnesota's future, official redistricting processes.

"It's an inherently political process," he said. In addition to partisan conflict the people in legislative process are seeking job security, and those on the fringes are trying to push their way in.

It's not an easy process to remake, McClure and Walz agreed, because there are so many competing interests. The commission sought an effective alternative that would both inform the courts about this year's maps and be a model for reforming the redistricting process in the future.

### **THE SOLUTION: The citizens commission model provides a fair, open and effective alternative.**

The Citizens Redistricting Commission held its first all-day meeting in July of this year. That meeting included training on the legal requirements of redistricting, compliance with the Voting Rights Act, and the process for redistricting in Minnesota.

Beginning in August the commission members conducted hearings in each of Minnesota's eight congressional districts. They discussed the redistricting process with citizens and documented citizens' input. These discussions informed a set of four principles that the commission developed to guide its map-making process, and that it hoped would help inform the judicial panel's principles.

The commission then met in the fall to review the feedback, establish criteria for drawing a map, and draft an initial redistricting map before visiting each of the congressional districts again. A GIS (geographic information systems) specialist was then hired to draw a final draft map of new district lines, incorporating feedback from the public meetings and the Commission's established principles. The purpose of this map was to offer one potential illustration of the Commission's principles to the judicial panel.

### **Four principles informed the creation of the CRC map.**

The speakers said that four themes emerged from the commission's discussions with citizens throughout the state. They are, in order of priority:

1. **Preserve communities of interest** , including but not limited to cities, counties, towns, sovereign entities, school districts, demographics, transportation corridors, and regional economic patterns.
2. **Ensure fair and non-diluting minority representation.**
3. **Do not intentionally protect or defeat incumbents.**
4. **Create compact districts.** Minnesotans voiced a desire to see the state's Congressional and legislative districts as compact as possible to ensure proper access to their representatives.

The commission settled on these four principles before bringing in the GIS specialist to draw a map based on them.

### **Maintaining communities of interest trumps competitiveness.**

The speakers said they found as they listened to comments in hearings around the state that preserving communities of interest was the commission's top priority. People that live in the rural

communities outside of a city like Willmar, for example, or Winona or Rochester, felt that the representation was centered in the cities and exclusive of townships or regions further out in the counties.

These people felt they were not being fully represented due to the way districts are currently divided- therefore, districts need to be better drawn to ensure that rural residents and their communities had a distinct voice. The speakers agreed but observed that some demographic and/or socioeconomic groups, like elderly, affluent families, or ethnic communities often live together and also share political tendencies like leaning Democrat or Republican-so competitiveness is not always possible. And, equally important for the Commission, forcing political competitiveness in these communities could require breaking apart these social and demographic communities of interest - an idea that ran counter to its most important principle. As a result, the commission decided to forgo prioritizing political competitiveness in its principles.

The commission had considered how to get all people who want to run for Congress and/or the legislature to enter races. "The state currently has six people of color serving in the legislature," Walz said, "but if it there were proportional to the demographics of the state, just based on representation that number would be 36. The commission sought ways to make more opportunity districts for members of minority communities, as well."

When a question arose about how best to define a community of interest, a participant noted that in Florida the definition is based on ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status. These traits have been used to assemble districts that are close together, with equal population, and with significant neighborhood cohesion.

### **The commission process led to ideas for further improvement.**

The speakers said that they are unsure about an ideal number of members for a commission like this, but it is important to be representative and diverse to reflect the state.

There is more work that could be done. "It would be interesting to put maps up on transparencies and see where the commonalities are among competing plans before the judicial panel," Walz said, "and incorporate those commonalities in the final map as well."

There were constraints on timeline and funding this time around. In the future it may be beneficial to start a commission's work a full year in advance. However, even given the limitations of the process, Walz and McClure said, they think it's important that citizens have a voice in the process.

### **Where does redistricting go from here?**

The intention of the citizens' commission was to see how the process could be done through a citizen-led design, and if it could work in the future.

Walter Mondale and Arne Carlson have called for an independent commission comprised of retired judges that would draw a map and send it to the legislature to vote up or down. The Citizens Commission has not endorsed that proposal, but would like to see citizens involved in any future process.

"I think if you have citizens involved in coming up with a redistricting plan, and the legislators can vote on that proposal, you've got a good balance," Walz said.

In submitting their plan to the judicial panel, the Commission requested that the judges solicit community input during their deliberations and allow citizens to give input on the final map. "We didn't have time for this and we think our map and all maps stand to benefit from additional citizen input," Walz said.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Presently there are no plans for a standing panel for redistricting, given the duration between censuses and the subsequent redrawing of boundaries.

"It's critical to get this right because decisions made in redistricting last ten years," Walz said. "As we all know, if a bad law is passed, it can be amended next year. A politician not responding to constituents can be voted out in two years but redistricting lasts a decade. It's imperative we get it right."

The chair thanked the speakers for a very informative visit.