



FOR YOUR INFORMATION: September 19, 2008

Contact: David Vance, 202-736-2200 ext. 17

Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Barack Obama (D-IL) may not agree on much, but both presidential candidates recognize the congressional redistricting process must be reformed. When the polls close November 4th, preparations will have already begun for the last cycle to elect those legislators who will redistrict their states after the 2010 Census. Unless reforms are passed between now and then, politicians will once again be choosing voters instead of voters choosing politicians.

Below you will find statements by Sen. Obama and Sen. McCain stressing both the problems with the current system and the urgent need to reform the redistricting process. You will also find a letter from Campaign Legal Center Policy Director Meredith McGehee to House Members urging them to support H. Res. 1365 supporting the use of independent commissions in redistricting.

PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES ON THE RECORD ON REDISTRICTING REFORM

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) on Redistricting Reform:

On the need for more competition:

“We need more competitive races. We need more moderation,” Sen. John McCain said in supporting a failed 2005 ballot measure in California that would have put retired judges in charge of redistricting.ⁱ

- The Washington Post 8/17/08

On supporting redistricting reform efforts nationwide:

*... ‘I have campaigned for reform efforts all over the country,’ McCain said at the first event, at a Burbank hotel. ‘What happens in California has significant effect in states like mine that are nearby. It’s just a reality.’ ... McCain emphasized his support for Proposition 77, the redistricting initiative.*ⁱⁱ

- The Associated Press 10/10/05

On rigged districts meaning incumbents never lose:

“This is Senator John McCain. The smear campaign against Proposition 77 is one of the most shameful and dishonest I’ve ever seen.

Don't be fooled. Prop. 77 is real bipartisan reform. An impartial commission would draw fair lines that you the people vote to approve.

Stop politicians in both parties from drawing rigged districts they can never lose. Vote yes on Prop.77 for real political reform on Tuesday.”ⁱⁱⁱ

-2005 RADIO AD TEXT PROMOTING CALIFORNIA'S PROPOSITION 77

PAGE 2

Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) on Redistricting:

Against mid-decade gerrymanders & for independent commissions:

Issue: Once-A-Decade Redistricting

As President, would you support federal legislation prohibiting states from redrawing valid congressional district lines more than once a decade?

Obama: *I opposed the partisan mid-decade gerrymandering that Tom Delay engineered in Texas. I believe that mid-decade redistricting is rarely justified. There may be some exceptional cases, such as a natural disaster, that create population shifts that may warrant mid-decade redistricting. But I do not support state efforts to redraw otherwise valid congressional district lines more than once a decade.*

Issue: Independent Redistricting Commissions

As President, would you support federal legislation requiring states to form diverse, transparent, and independent redistricting commissions to redraw congressional district lines?

Obama: *I would encourage states to form such commissions.*^{iv}

- Responses to Midwest Democracy Network candidate questionnaire 11/27/07

For voters choosing politicians and against politicians choosing their voters:

“Election reform,” he said, “is one where Americans have the tendency to go from shocked to trance.”

“In too many districts today, people's votes probably won't make a difference,” Obama said. “As a consequence of the gerrymandering of redistricting, people aren't being illogical when they stay home because the outcome is a foregone conclusion.”

Then, he added: *“We now have a system where too often, representatives are selecting their voters instead of voters selecting their representatives. That is a situation that we should not accept.”*

“The idea of redistricting is a complicated problem,” Obama said, noting that he is looking to the Supreme Court to give guidance in a Texas redistricting case it is considering. “But I cannot imagine any scenario where Congress would draw new districts, thereby rendering half of the seats competitive”^v

- *The Baltimore Sun* 2/8/06

On fixing the Texas mid-decade gerrymander:

Obama campaign manager Steve Hildebrand called Texas “*one of the most important redistricting opportunities in the country*,” and he said the campaign's goal would be to influence the outcomes of specific local elections.^{vi}

- *The Houston Chronicle* 6/26/08

ⁱ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/17/AR2008081702049.html>

ⁱⁱ http://www.democrats.org/a/2005/11/even_mccain_cou.php

ⁱⁱⁱ Proposition 77 appeared on the November 8, 2005 statewide ballot in California. The proposed constitutional amendment, which sought to create an impartial redistrict commission for California's Senate, Assembly, Congressional and Board of Equalization districts, was rejected.

<http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/11-06-2005/0004209221&EDATE>

^{iv} <http://www.midwestdemocracynetwork.org/templates/media/MDNPresidentialQuestionnaire.pdf>

^v http://weblogs.baltimoresun.com/news/politics/blog/2006/02/obama_the_gerrymandering_jumbl.html

^{vi} <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/casey/5859208.html>



September 9, 2008

Dear Representative:

The Campaign Legal Center strongly urges you to join as a cosponsor of H.Res. 1365, introduced in June by Rep. John Tanner (D-TN) and Rep. Zach Wamp (R-TN). The resolution calls for the use of nonpartisan redistricting commissions to draw Congressional districts. The idea is a common sense solution that would strengthen our democracy on numerous levels.

The redistricting process is in need of serious reform. To ensure elections are meaningful and provide for accountability, voters should choose their candidate. Unfortunately, too often, it is just the opposite: incumbents selecting their own electorate. The unprecedented post-2000 efforts to use the redistricting process for partisan purposes were a successful attempt, through extreme gerrymandering, to create still more non-competitive districts in order to protect incumbent officeholders.

Redistricting reform is not a partisan issue. Democrats and Republicans alike are perpetrators and victims of the undemocratic abuse of partisan and even bipartisan gerrymanders across our nation, but in the end it is our nation's citizens who suffer most from these maneuvers that lessen competition and accountability.

Studies have shown that as incumbents are continually re-elected, the number of voters on each Election Day steadily declines. This lack of competition causes legislators to feel "safe" within their districts and, more often than not, results in Representatives who feel immune to accountability. Additionally, those districts shaped to benefit highly partisan representatives contribute to the unfortunate and counter-productive gridlock that has become part and parcel of politics in the nation's capital.

In the end, it is American voters who suffer from redistricting abuses. This broken system not only fails to reflect the true distribution of a state's population, but also undermines our representative democracy.

To cosponsor H.Res. 1365, please contact Carling Dinkler (202) 225-4714 in the office of Rep. John Tanner (D-TN). If you would like additional information on redistricting issues, please contact Meredith McGehee at mmcgehee@campaignlegalcenter.org.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue of such great importance to the health of our democracy.

Sincerely,



Meredith McGehee
Policy Director