

THE CHALLENGE OF REDISTRICTING

The People Must Make Voices Heard in the Legislative Debate

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A vital process in our democracy, redistricting, is taking place right now in New Mexico. If we allow the Legislature to draw its own district lines without hearing from the public, we have abdicated our responsibility as citizens to elect the officials we want. Instead, we will have reversed the process and allowed the legislators to tell us what constituents they want to serve. That is not how democracy should work.

The state Legislature's Redistricting Committee has already held six public hearings around the state to collect comments and concerns from voters. Brian Sanderoff from Research & Polling, Inc. has been there to explain the numerous "concept" plans he has prepared for redistricting the state. Tribal and local officials have been present at some of the meetings. The League of Women Voters has been there to videotape the meetings and comment on the process. But, some very key people in this process have been absent — we, the voting

members of the public, have stayed in the comfort of our homes rather than get out and participate in our democracy.

Many people may say that redistricting is a complicated process that the ordinary citizen cannot understand because maps are complex to read, census data are hard to understand or backroom politics will draw the lines the way they want anyway.

To the contrary, I say that we citizens do not need to understand the computer technology behind map-drawing in order to have an impact on the redistricting process. How? We can go to the next public meetings to be held in Albuquerque and Rio Rancho on Aug. 15 and 16 and tell the committee what our neighborhood is like; what we consider to be its boundaries; whether our legislator represents our views; whether our neighborhood is made up primarily of families with school-age children, working-class people, millionaires or retirees; what geographic features distinguish our neighborhood from adjoining areas; whether the neighborhood is primarily single-family homes or apartment buildings; where area children go to school; what

cultural, ethnic or religious traits are present in our neighborhoods. All of these facts are relevant to the drawing of lines for legislative districts.

And the very best person to tell these facts is you. Don't let the Legislature make assumptions about your neighborhood. Stand up and tell them!

Legislative lines will be drawn for the next 10 years — until the census in 2020. The population in Albuquerque's West Side and in Rio Rancho has grown astronomically in the last 10 years. These communities will gain at least two seats in the Legislature. In contrast, population on the east side of Albuquerque and in rural New Mexico has shrunk. They will lose at least two seats. This process will also determine whether Rio Rancho remains split between two congressional districts or is redistricted to be in one. It will determine whether parts Paradise Hills moves into District 1 and whether some precincts in eastern Bernalillo County will move to District 3.

The stakes are high in this process. We, the people, need to make our voices heard in our representative democracy.

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