



Wisconsin State Assembly

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Competitive Districts are Key to Representation

Constitutional amendment to change redistricting guidelines in Wisconsin

MADISON – State Representatives Frederick P. Kessler (D-Milwaukee) and Spencer Black (D-Madison) are preparing to propose a resolution to amend the Wisconsin Constitution to set requirements to govern redistricting of state Senate and state Assembly districts to create more competitive districts in an attempt to achieve greater representation of the interests of the citizens of Wisconsin.

“Fair redistricting is essential for democracy to flourish and for citizens to have confidence in government,” said Representative Kessler.

The redistricting plan itself would create a state redistricting board made up of the attorney general, the secretary of state, the state treasurer, the state superintendent of public instruction, and a final member that would be appointed by the state supreme court. The plan would establish the procedure, as well as define demographic and political standards for the drawing of legislative districts. Using the criteria outlined in the legislation, Legislative Technology Services Bureau, a non-partisan state agency, would produce three sample maps and submit them to the state redistricting board for final selection.

The requirements stipulate that the Legislative Technology Services Bureau will draft computer generated maps that provide:

- 20 Assembly districts and 7 Senate districts with a partisan division that varies less than one percent based on a five election state-wide average.
- One party will hold a one seat advantage in the Assembly (50 to 49) and the other party with a one seat advantage in the Senate (17 to 16).
- That no seat is over 80% favorable to any party.

Kessler believes that if more districts were actually competitive, elected officials would be more inclined to work together to get important legislation passed that would genuinely help the people of Wisconsin.

“The fewer districts that are truly competitive diminishes the incentive for candidates to reach across party lines and compromise on the major issues of the day,” explained Representative Kessler.

Representative Black pointed out that the amendment will take the job of redrawing congressional and legislative districts away from the Legislature and Governor and put primary responsibility in the hands of the non-partisan and independent Legislative Technology Services Bureau.

“When politicians draw the lines, they have one thing in mind: getting themselves re-elected. When politicians redraw their own districts, the process takes longer and costs more. “It is time to replace the partisan game of redistricting with a non-partisan, independent process that will put the voters’ interests first and saves tax dollars,” Black said.

Black said the current process in which legislators hire lawyers at taxpayer expense to battle in court is unnecessarily wasteful. The redistricting battle in 2002 cost taxpayers almost \$2 million in legal fees.

“This sort of change may not be popular with members of the legislature who currently hold safe seats, however often the thing that is unpopular to do is the right thing to do,” Representative Kessler stated. “The time for this state constitutional change is now.”

The rules that govern Wisconsin’s method of redistricting are written in the constitution so the only way to change the state’s redistricting rules is to amend the constitution. Constitutional amendments in Wisconsin must be passed by two consecutive legislatures before being placed on the ballot for a referendum by the voters.

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