



THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF CALIFORNIA'S
VOICES OF REFORM PROJECT
Promoting State Governance that is Responsive, Representative, and Fiscally Sound



May 31, 2006

(This draft reflects signatures added to this letter since 5/31/06.)^{v1}

California State Senate
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator:

We wish today to express our strong support for improving the integrity of California's legislative redistricting process.

Over the past several weeks more than 100 Californians – community leaders who represent the breadth of this state's political spectrum – have volunteered to identify fundamental reforms that could significantly improve the quality of public policy in a wide range of areas and help restore public confidence in government. Our intent is to convey broad, bipartisan support for action on the part of the state's elected representatives, while also promoting public awareness of these critical issues.

We include professionals from government, academia, journalism, issue and community advocacy, labor and business. We are diverse in political affiliation, professional experience, and regional origin. We have in common, however, an unwavering commitment to the future of our state.

Each of us has dedicated much of his or her professional life to public service, and we agree that the state's policy-making should be conducted – and has the potential to be conducted – in a responsive, representative, fiscally responsible, transparent and publicly accessible way. Moreover, we share a belief that sound public policy provides the structure for a vibrant, inclusive economy, opportunity for all Californians, and wise planning for future generations. Unfortunately, we also are united in the view that California's current system of politics and government is falling short of this goal.

This need not be the case. We can improve the way government works. We can broaden real access to the institutions of government and improve how they are perceived by the public. We can restore trust in government.

Genuinely achieving this result will require reform in multiple areas, none of which will be easy. It will require meaningful change in the process by which the state budget is determined and managed, in the way political campaigns (for candidates and initiatives) are financed, and in how the state's initiative process functions. It will require reform that creates real opportunity for ordinary citizens to run for public office, that addresses the conditions and rules under which officeholders serve, and that enhances public participation in policy making. We believe multi-faceted change in these areas is essential to the future success of California, and we urge your support and cooperation to secure that change.

Reforming the process for drawing congressional and legislative districts would be one vital contribution to this goal. That process has evolved over the years, due in no small measure to advances in technology. Since the 1970s, districts have been drawn both by the Legislature and by retired judges appointed by the state Supreme Court. Based upon this experience, many people believe that a nonpartisan, neutral hand would improve not only the process but also the public's regard for the process. An independent commission would ensure open, responsive and accountable redistricting.

The time for ongoing deliberation on this and other needed reforms has passed. We call upon the California Legislature to rise above partisan differences, to resist allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the good and to act decisively to create this first, significant reform. We offer our encouragement and help, and we confirm, by virtue of our signatures, our support for the following redistricting position:

Statement in Support of Redistricting Reform

We believe that the inherent conflict of interest that results from legislators directly determining the shape of the districts for which they or other members of their party will compete in future elections contributes to the erosion of public confidence in government, undermines genuine political representation and has the potential to negatively affect the quality of public policy.

Therefore, we support steps to eliminate this conflict of interest and related incentives to create non-competitive, safe seats, while strengthening the overall integrity of the legislative redistricting process.

Achieving these goals should include, at a minimum, the following actions:

- 1) Establish a process that is representative of the state's diversity for appointing an independent redistricting commission balanced in partisan representation;
- 2) Establish a transparent and inclusive process for the independent commission to integrate public comment into the redistricting process. This should include public meetings throughout the state and timely public access to any substantive material under consideration by the commission;
- 3) Ensure the independent commission complies fully with the Voting Rights Act and equal population requirements; and
- 4) Ensure clear guidelines are established directing the commission to respect traditional redistricting criteria including (but not limited to) respect for communities of similar social, cultural, ethnic, geographic, or economic interest, respect for city and county boundaries, and formation of contiguous districts.

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We have great confidence in the institutions of Government in California, including the office of the Governor and the Legislature. The recent agreement to submit an infrastructure bond proposal to the voters this November is the most recent example of our elected representatives working together. It is in this spirit that we express encouragement and support for legislation that can strengthen the quality of our policymaking process, thereby laying the foundation for California's talented, resourceful, innovative, and richly diverse population to achieve its greatest potential. Again, we offer our genuine and sustained support and assistance toward this goal.

Sincerely,

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