

For Immediate Release:
Friday Dec. 17, 2021

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COMMON CAUSE NEW MEXICO'S STATEMENT ON SPECIAL REDISTRICTING SESSION

Like most New Mexicans, Common Cause New Mexico believes that in a democracy, voters should pick their leaders and leaders should not pick their own voters. In the last few days of the special session, voters were subjected to a process wherein senators, in particular, drew lines for their own districts behind closed doors, at times threatening to reject public input and a tribal consensus formed over months through the Citizens Redistricting Commission.

The good news is that in the end, senators chose—by in large—to reject the blatant protection of incumbents in favor of a map that did not overturn the monumental achievement of 23 sovereign nations: agreement on a single plan that did not impair their voting rights in the face of a historic census undercount while keeping their communities of interest together. That achievement is even more important when you remember that pueblos and tribes are spread out over what is geographically, the 5th largest state in the nation.

We give credit to legislators who carefully considered the maps drawn by the non-partisan Citizens Redistricting Commission, which itself performed an amazing feat. With a parsimonious budget, and only the able staffing provided by the NM Ethics Commission, it traveled the state, collecting over 2000 public comments and dozens of citizen-drawn maps. It met multiple times, and recommended three concepts for Congressional House, Senate and Public Education Commission. In the end many of the maps endorsed by the legislature were based on those recommended by the commission—with important controversial—modifications.

Nevertheless, as the final days of the session made all too clear, New Mexico needs a process that is transparent and rejects the current legislative imperative of incumbent protection in favor of the basics of redistricting: protection of minority voting rights and communities of interest. This can only be done through a constitutional amendment that establishes an independent citizen's redistricting commission that is free of the kind of political deals and procedural stunts that characterized this year's special session. Common Cause continues to believe, in that path, which will restore the trust in the process that New Mexico now so sorely needs.

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