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Wisconsin legislature should establish a redistricting system similar to that in Iowa says nonpartisan political organization.

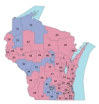
MADISON, WI - With a legacy going back almost a century and a presence in all 50 states, the League of Women Voters takes the long view on how voting district maps are drawn. In Wisconsin the League has been active on apportionment and redistricting since the 1930s. Through the decades our stance has sometimes lined up with that of one major political party or the other, but that is not because we have changed our minds about where we stand.

The Wisconsin League adopted a position in the 1970s favoring voting maps drawn by a nonpartisan entity, rather than by the legislators who might want to ensure their own job security by creating “safe” districts. It’s the voters who should choose their representatives, not the other way around. Currently we support having a nonpartisan legislative agency draw the maps, a plan that has worked well in Iowa since 1980. Over the years our position has not sat well with the party in power.

In a 1989 letter to the League, Assembly Speaker Dave Travis, a liberal Democrat, blasted the League for our position favoring an independent commission. He said the League “allowed itself to be used for partisan political purposes on behalf of the Republican Party of Wisconsin during the 1980s redistricting process.”

That was then. Now it’s the Republican legislators who oppose nonpartisan redistricting. That party’s leaders have refused to even hold a public hearing for the “Iowa Plan” bill which was

introduced in each of the past four sessions. The Democrats, on the other hand, may be wishing they had followed the League's advice in the 1980s or in the 2009 legislative session, when their party controlled both houses of the legislature and governor's office.



What has changed between the 1980s and today? Not the League's position. All that has changed is which party is in power. The party in power got there through the current system and is often reluctant to make any changes. This is happening in both red states and blue states around the country. In Maryland and New Jersey, the League has recently fought against gerrymandering by the Democrats.

This battle really is between the party leaders, much more than the public. The latest Marquette University Law School Poll found that 72 percent of likely voters, including 63 percent of Republican leaners and 83 percent of Democratic leaners, say they would prefer to have district maps drawn by a nonpartisan commission.

It is expected that a new bill will be introduced soon in the Wisconsin legislature to establish a redistricting system similar to that in Iowa. If enacted, this would result in fair districts for voters rather than safe districts for politicians. It would cost taxpayers well under $100,000 every ten years, with most of that spent on public hearings held around the state to get public input. Compare that to the $3 million and counting that has already been spent or committed to have a private law firm draw the voting maps back in 2011 and then have the state defend the gerrymandered districts in the courts.

When this legislation is introduced it should have a public hearing and a vote in both houses of the state legislature, and then Governor Evers should sign it into law. In addition, nonpartisan redistricting should be incorporated into the biennial state budget, which will be in effect through June of 2020. Given that the nonpartisan process will be less expensive than what we have had in the past, it will free up needed tax dollars for better pursuits than rigged districts.

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Andrea Kaminski is the Legislative Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin. The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is a nonpartisan political organization that advocates for informed and active participation in government. There are 20 local Leagues throughout Wisconsin. More information at lwvwi.org