



OUR VIEW: Legislative remap an issue worth changing

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Redrawing the map for Illinois legislative districts will be among the actions that follow the 2010 census.

Appropriately, policymakers are looking at the mapmaking process now, evaluating possible changes. This process is important to lawmakers because it sets the boundaries for their districts for 10 years.

For some, new boundary lines can make it difficult to be elected. For others, boundary lines are favorable.

Most people outside the General Assembly aren't going to pay a lot of attention to this process.

What people may notice is how those intimately involved ultimately eventually settle differences and determine who gets to draw the map. You may recall that in Illinois one way this issue has been resolved is to literally draw out of a hat, like an Abraham Lincoln-style hat. "Illinois is the only state with democracy by lottery," said state Sen. Dale Righter, who is a leading Republican on the committee working on redistricting issues.

Setting such an important matter by drawing out of a hat draws attention, and we all get a chuckle of the way we do political things here in Illinois. But it's not the right way.

Righter and others are trying to find a course to resolve differences differently. Righter met with the JG/T-C recently and described some of the work to date, and some of the possible ways to change things for the better.

The current system, he correctly points out, is designed to protect those already in office, and reduce the likelihood that there will be many competitive races for seats in the General Assembly. Then both parties can put the money they raise into a few competitive races, while most of the members remain comfortable they will be re-elected.

Righter himself has benefited from this system in that his current district is a relatively safe Republican district that hasn't even drawn a Democratic opponent.

In one of the proposals, Righter said a constitutional amendment would be placed on the November 2010 ballot that would change the rules for drawing district boundaries in Illinois. Righter said the key points for him are for the map to be drawn by people other than current elected officials, that those drawing the map be prohibited from considering where lawmakers reside, that those drawing the map be prohibited from taking into account the party affiliation of voters, and that the map comply with federal law.

Using those ground rules would result in a district boundaries in which voters would pick lawmakers, as opposed to lawmakers picking their voters, Righter said, adding one likely result would be more contested, competitive races.

Certainly, it makes sense to approve a new process that eliminates the farce of settling this issue by drawing out of hat.

The principles Righter outlines seem sensible enough. And we're glad to see efforts to address this issue now.

Perhaps the best way to solve the problem would be a computer program that would make districts as compact as possible without cutting through the middle of communities.

Of course, the problem would then be to define what is a community.

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