

What is Redistricting Part II: Gerrymandering and the Courts on Redistricting

By Donald Scarinci

In most states, the state legislature reconfigures its own map and the congressional map every ten years when the census numbers are finalized. Fifteen states have created redistricting commissions claiming that these commissions would be less political.

The fact is that even in the states that create district maps by special commissions with tie breaking voters are political. They don't start out that way. Everyone makes great speeches about "fairness" and "equity" but in the end, in every state that redistricts by commission, it is a political decision based on party politics. Diane Carman writing for the Denver Post ten years ago said, "Getting the partisanship out of politics is like trying to take the sex out of porn."

Since the beginning of our nation, there was always gamesmanship. The most famous story comes to us from Massachusetts in 1812. Governor Eldbridge Gerry, a patriot who was outspoken in his support for Samuel Adams before the American Revolution, takes the rap for the redistricting practice known as "Gerrymandering." Gerry was the leader of the Democratic - Republican Party in Massachusetts. To prevent the Federalists from winning control of Massachusetts, Gerry supported a map that captured 29 legislative seats for his Democratic Republican party and only 11 seats for the Federalist Party even though the Democratic Republican party only had 50,164 votes while the Federalists had 51,766 votes in Massachusetts. The Gerrymandering of Massachusetts gave a more than 2 to one majority to a political party that represented less than half of the voting population.

Even as the work of the state legislatures and commissions conclude their deliberations and recommend new voting maps over the next several months, redistricting will remain in the news for years. There will be new issues that the courts will be called upon to decide and the political gamesmanship between the political parties will inevitably work its way to the judicial branch of government as their referee.

To watch the video on What is Redistricting Part II: Gerrymandering and the Courts on Redistricting please click here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmxEWjZFRoE>