

# The Detroit News

## Column: Independent boards should draw voting districts

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In today's political environment, many voters will say that they feel disconnected from decisions that are being made by our leaders in Lansing. From political gridlock to out-of-step policies, Michigianians are left wondering where the passion to find compromise and solutions for pressing issues has gone. One key reason very little is getting done stems from the fact we allow our representatives to choose their voters, rather than voters choosing their representatives.

The current system of redistricting, the process by which new congressional and state legislative district lines are drawn, lets elected officials do so to their liking and to the advantage of their political party. It also increases the power of wealthy special interests so that they are able to further rig the system to their own selfish benefit. This effectively, but disingenuously, ignores the will of the majority of voters who believe in compromise and the ability to work together to build a better Michigan for everyone.

Many other states across the country face this problem and some have adopted measures to correct it. In Arizona, citizens decided to implement an independent commission that would draw district lines free of outside influence — a tool that should be considered in Michigan.

Arizona legislators fought against the commission because they said that they should be allowed to influence how lines are drawn, but just last week the United States Supreme Court ruled that such decisions rest with citizens. Not only did the Supreme Court reject the Legislature's argument and find constitutionality in the independent commission, they sent a clear message to the rest of the country that these commissions are tools for voters to make their voices heard.

It is important that we start to make progress on changing how our lines are drawn. Whether it is done through an independent commission or other methods, it's time to take the process out of the hands of politicians. The League of Women Voters will be announcing an education campaign soon to help voters understand how we can change the system to work for us. We will also start to engage opinion leaders on why it is important to return power to Michigan citizens. Independent commissions are a possible first step in doing so.

The Supreme Court's opinion is best summed up by the line, "In so acting, Arizona voters sought to restore the core principle of republican government," namely, "that the voters should choose their representatives, not the other way around."

Together we can restore our democracy and establish a system where we choose our representatives, not the other way around.

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