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Effort to Strip Oklahoma Legislature From Congressional Redistricting Begun

A group that dubs itself “nonpartisan” has filed an initiative petition in Oklahoma to strip the Oklahoma Legislature of its ability to redraw its congressional district boundaries after next year’s decennial census. Part of a national movement to usurp the power of state legislatures to craft congressional district boundaries, the group wants to amend the state constitution to install what they call a “Citizens’ Independent Redistricting Commission.”



The group is calling itself the People Not Politicians. According to the proposal filed on Monday, a nine-person commission would replace the elected legislators and the governor, who have handled redistricting since Oklahoma became a state in 1907. In its place would be nine unelected officials, with six members chosen by a panel of retired Oklahoma judges, including the chief justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Then those unelected six commissioners would name three more unelected commissioners.

In other words, the proposal would take power away from the Oklahoma Legislature to redraw the congressional district lines and empower retired members of the judicial branch to control the redistricting process.

The proposal would require that three of the commissioners be Republicans, three be Democrats, and three would supposedly be “unaffiliated” with either party.

“This proposal will prevent self-serving politicians from manipulating the system and force them to listen to the people they represent instead of pandering to special interests and their party’s extremes,” said Andy Moore, who is the founder and executive director of Let’s Fix This. Also included in the coalition working to take away the redistricting power from Oklahoma’s elected legislators and give it to unelected persons is the left-wing League of Women Voters.

The Republican leadership of the Oklahoma Legislature is not buying the assertion that it is bipartisan, with Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat saying, “This is a redistricting coup, not an attempt at fair maps. This is a power play by out-of-state liberals.” Treat vowed, “The Oklahoma Senate will do its job and handle redistricting in a fair manner.”

House Speaker Charles McCall expressed similar disdain at the proposal. “This petition is a solution in search of a problem in a state like Oklahoma that has not had problems with or successful lawsuits over its redistricting process.” McCall added that the 14-page process the petitioners are advocating is “convoluted.” McCall argued that the proposal would make legislators *less* accountable to the voters, not more accountable.

Under the state law, the petitioners have 90 days to collect nearly 178,000 valid signatures to force a statewide vote on the proposed constitutional amendment. Presently, the Oklahoma Legislature uses



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the census data provided by the federal government and re-draws the congressional district boundaries. Under federal law, each district must be substantially equal in population, as compact as possible, and contiguous (all parts of the district must touch).

According to Article I, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution, the states — through their legislative bodies — have the primary authority in redistricting. “The times, places and manner of holding elections for senators and representatives, shall be prescribed in each state by the legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by law make or alter such regulations.”

Unfortunately, nearly 20 states have surrendered the authority of their legislative branch — those who are actually accountable to their voters at the ballot box — to these supposedly nonpartisan bodies.

Such proposals are also damaging to the principle of federalism, reducing the clout that state legislatures have in our federal system. It is one of the few restraints that state legislatures retain over their members of Congress. In the original Constitution, U.S. senators were chosen for six-year terms by their state legislatures, but that power was lost with the 17th Amendment. If one wonders why the power of the government in Washington, D.C. has grown and the power of the states has declined, the 17th Amendment has played a significant role in that.

Now, with these supposedly nonpartisan “redistricting commissions,” members of Congress will have little regard as to what the legislature thinks, and instead will be beholden to an unelected body of commissioners chosen by members of the judicial branch — who are in many states, like Oklahoma, not elected by the people, either.

When reduced to its essence, the present arguments over congressional redistricting expose the stark reality that the Left simply does not like our form of government. “Think Progress” has said on its website that they are disenchanted with the members of the House of Representatives representing the people of a specific congressional district, rather than the country as a whole. The national vote has no impact on what a specific congressional district decides.

This is a Trojan Horse — and Americans need to wake up as to what is going on with this effort.

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