

Illinois Redistricting Collaborative

Talking Points – Feb. Update

Goals:

- Raise public awareness of gerrymandering as a key election-year issue
- Create press opportunities on gerrymandering to engage the public and use them as a public accountability tool
- Get candidates for governor and the General Assembly on the record on gerrymandering and on how they will fix the problem

Messaging Priorities

To get our message across and get the general public to *hear us* on why gerrymandering is a critical issue, we need to make gerrymandering a “kitchen-table topic” by clearly articulating how the issue affects everyday Illinoisans.

To do this we will split our messaging into three different parts:

1. What gerrymandering is & why it's important
2. Why we need to act now
3. Our plan to fix it

TALKING POINTS

1. WHAT GERRYMANDERING IS & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

- **It's all about power.** Every 10 years when U.S. Census data is released, political parties draw legislative boundaries based on which voters are most likely to give them a political advantage on Election Day. Put simply, redistricting determines political power.
- **Inc incumbency Protection.** Unlike other states that gerrymander voters to discriminate against people of a certain race or party, here in Illinois, it's about protecting incumbents from competitive elections. The mapmakers draw the districts to be so heavily partisan that it's basically impossible for an incumbent to lose. They reward the officials that toe the party line with safe seats and in

return, keep themselves in leadership positions they've held much too long.

- **Politicians choosing their own constituents.** In grade school, we learned that *We The People* vote and choose our own representatives to serve our needs in government. With gerrymandering in place, the process has been flipped on its head. **Politicians are choosing their own voters, instead of the other way around.**

Consequences of Gerrymandering Talking Points

- **Hyper-partisanship.** In many places in Illinois, the primary election is much more competitive than the general; this is not normal. It happens because gerrymandering has created such a high number of safe seats. The most extreme candidates from both parties therefore win seats by fighting over the most fervent supporters, which fuels the growing partisan divide and results in gridlock.
- **Unrepresentative government.** More than 60 percent of state legislative general elections in 2016 were uncompetitive, meaning that incumbents faced little or no opposition. Why? Because the gerrymandered maps made those districts so partisan - favoring one party or another - that the other party would have absolutely no chance to compete.
- **Lack of Voter Choice.** By removing the opportunity for you to vote for an opposing candidate, gerrymandering effectively takes away your voice at the ballot box.
- **Unaccountable elected officials.** When we such a high number of districts that are uncompetitive and uncontested, there is no way to hold our elected officials accountable. Too many elected officials know they can safely coast to reelection without listening to their constituents or fighting for our votes. Instead, they focus on their own personal or partisan goals and ignore the needs of the people they're supposed to represent.
- **Bad policy.** We've seen how the effects of gerrymandering have hurt our state. Illinois went without a budget for more than two years because of bipartisan gridlock. We wasted more than \$1 billion alone just paying our interest debt. The state's budget crisis and recent school funding battles are just two examples of how gerrymandering maps have led to extreme partisanship in Springfield that has stalled any resolution to our state's critical challenges.

Racial Equity

- **Gerrymandering hurts communities of color.** Historically, politicians used gerrymandering to practice vote dilution, or the spreading of minority voters thinly across several districts to minimize their electoral power. In other cases, they packed communities of color together to minimize the number of potential minority representatives. Creating majority-minority districts helps prevent communities of color from being used to maximize partisan advantage by either party.
- **Fair maps can increase diversity in government.** After California enacted their independent commission to fix gerrymandering, the Golden State saw a 50 percent increase in the number of majority-minority legislative districts.
- **People of color are underrepresented in Illinois government.** A 2015 report from Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights found that the vast majority (85%) of the 237 municipalities, county governments and school districts studied in Illinois are under-represented by people of color when compared to their populations. And 38 jurisdictions have what the report termed "severe underrepresentation," with a sufficiently large minority population that, if voting cohesively and using an appropriate election system, could elect at least one additional candidate of its choice.

2. WHY WE NEED TO ACT NOW: THE 2018 ELECTION & THE 2020 CENSUS

2018 Election Cycle Talking Points

- **This election cycle is critical.** The governor and the state senators elected in November will be the ones determining the maps that will last us until 2031. As voters, we need to hold their feet to the fire and demand that they put our interests first.
- **The next governor decides if our maps will be fair.** The winner of the 2018 gubernatorial election will preside over the next redistricting process in 2021. They have the power to approve or veto maps that would unfairly gerrymander Illinois voters.

2020 Census Talking Points

- **The census is essential for everyone to be counted.** The count should be accurate, valid, reliable, and fair. If the Census is underfunded, communities across Illinois - especially in poor, urban and rural areas - will be undercounted, skewing our maps and diminishing our voices at the ballot box.
- Every American wants their voice to be heard and to be counted in selecting the people and policies that will determine the future of our families. That starts with a fair and reliable census. Our vote is the first, most important step in the process of self-governance in our representative democracy. In order for our vote to be truly counted accurately, we need fair districts, which require an accurate and fair census count. Reliable census data is essential to creating districts where everyone is counted equally.
- **Fair districts mean counting everyone equally, playing by the rules, and having a transparent process.** Every person living in a community must be fully and accurately counted. This can be achieved through a fair and reliable census. Districts must adhere to the requirements of the Voting Rights Act and decision-makers should prioritize keeping communities of interest together. A transparent process that allows the public to fully engage requires meetings of decision-makers to be held in public, enforces strong conflict of interest protections, and makes data and software being used to draw districts publicly available.
- **The first step in ending gerrymandering is having an accurate and fair census.** Voters in both parties are tired of politicians drawing their own districts and manipulating voting maps. There is no question we must end gerrymandering to ensure fair political representation for all Americans. But in order to do that, it is essential to have reliable and valid census data for nonpartisan experts to draw fair districts. Accurate census data is also essential for everyday people to challenge partisan and racial gerrymandering in the courts.

3. OUR PLAN TO FIX GERRYMANDERING

Independent commission

- **Remove politics from the mapmaking process.** Every decade, Springfield politicians have proven they should

not be trusted to draw their own maps. It's time to stop giving them the benefit of the doubt.

- **Independence is necessary.** Neither party should be able to misuse the redistricting process to keep themselves in office. Redistricting should be independent from political parties and legislative leaders. An independent commission can reflect a broad range of viewpoints and identities that represent communities who are as politically, demographically, and geographically diverse as our state.

Transparency & Public Accountability Talking Points

- **Representative democracy works best when the public actively engages with policy discussions and elections.** Redistricting reform will offer diverse voices and independent thinkers an opportunity to serve. Breaking partisan gridlock and restoring functional state government is essential for Illinois' future and is an especially urgent call to action as we near the 2020 Census.
- **The public has a right to know how the maps are drawn.** Currently, the maps are created in secret and behind closed doors. As voters, we deserve to know how the maps are being drawn and have the opportunity to participate in the process.

Focusing on a Legislative Constitution Amendment

- **A broader reform effort.** We chose a legislative constitutional amendment as our strategy because it actually allows us to better and more completely fix the problem of gerrymandering. It does not have the same restrictions of previous citizens' petition approaches, and allows our coalition to push for reform for *both* the General Assembly maps as well the Congressional map – instead of just the former like in prior efforts.
- **Still giving voters a say.** A legislative constitutional amendment still give voters the final say in the fight for redistricting reform. After both chambers of the General Assembly pass the amendment it would go to the ballot as a referendum for the public to vote on, giving *We The People*, instead of the politicians, final say over who gets to draw the maps.
- **Multi-year strategy.** Our strategy is a multi-year effort leading up the redistricting process of 2021. We want to

build up legislative support for an amendment over multiple elections cycles. This way we can hold elected officials accountable at the ballot box for saying one thing, but doing another.

- **Too much legal uncertainty in other approaches.** The Illinois Supreme Court threw out the Independent Map Amendment in the Fall of 2016, but they didn't address all the counts before it (only 1 of 7). This leaves a lot of uncertainty with the citizens' petition approach that we felt would be too costly – both with time and financial requirements to make that strategy worth the risk this time around.

Why it's going to work this time

- **Momentum is growing in the fight for redistricting reform.** In Illinois, more than 560,000 voters signed petitions in 2016 to put an independent redistricting commission question on the ballot. In courts around the country, cases are being heard that are throwing out gerrymandering maps.
- **Illinoisans want reform, overwhelmingly.** A recent poll from the Paul Simon Institute found that 72 percent of Illinois voters – across party lines – want an independent commission to draw the lines.
- **Broad-based coalition.** We are a part of a coalition with diverse political and geographic backgrounds and support from the business community and communities of color representing hundreds of thousands of Illinois voters. When we mobilize, our voices can be heard.