

Common Cause: Flawed, partisan, redistricting measure gets a public hearing and overwhelming opposition at the Capitol last week

Posted on Wednesday, Oct 25, 2023

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At the Capitol last Thursday October 19th in the first officially sanctioned legislative public hearing on redistricting reform legislation held in 14 years in Wisconsin, virtually everyone who testified, did so in opposition to the partisan Republican redistricting legislation - [Senate Bill 488](#) & [Assembly Bill 415](#). Only four people — all of them Republican legislators — spoke strongly in favor of it. Opponents, including CC/WI Director **Jay Heck**'s lead-off testimony, cited "trust" issues and a flawed bill and process and a lack of bipartisan and citizen input. The hearing room was filled to capacity, with dozens testifying and not a single "citizen" spoke in full support of SB 488/AB 415.

[Here is Jay Heck's full testimony](#) from Thursday, although he spoke extemporaneously and tried to be conciliatory and make the point that while the public hearing was appreciated, it needed to be only the first such exercise and encounter with the public and that there must be genuine bipartisan discussion and collaboration in the months ahead. Heck also emphasized that there should be no rush to get the legislation to the full legislature for a vote until there had been a bipartisan meeting of the minds and improvements to the legislation had been achieved.

"Without that trust and buy-in from all those affected, a major, once in a generation reform measure like this simply cannot succeed," Heck said.

When asked by what he thought was behind the rushed, partisan process Heck

candidly replied that it was driven by Republican fear of what the Wisconsin Supreme Court might decide in the pending lawsuit on the current, rigged GOP state legislative voting maps. Oral arguments are set to occur on the lawsuit on November 21st. Republicans are very concerned about trying to supplant an adverse (for them) Supreme Court ruling by making the case that their legislation ought to be the “remedy” to partisan gerrymandering, instead of the court’s decision.

Media coverage of last Thursday’s Capitol event was extensive. For more on what transpired in this first “official” legislative redistricting public hearing conducted since 2009, you can read:

- [Democrats and members of the public criticize Republicans’ ‘Iowa-style’ redistricting plan First public hearing on bill to change how voting maps are drawn.](#) Baylor Spears, Wisconsin Examiner, October 20, 2023
- [Divisive ‘Iowa-style’ redistricting bill receives first public hearing in Wisconsin.](#) Alexander Shur, Wisconsin State Journal, October 20, 2023
- [Democrats, Fair Maps Advocates assail Wisconsin Republicans’ nonpartisan redistricting legislation.](#) Mary Bosch, The Daily Cardinal, October 24, 2023

No word yet on when or if Senate Bill 488 will be suddenly rushed to the floor of the full State Senate in the weeks immediately ahead. We most certainly hope not. This entire process needs to be slowed down considerably and, as we have emphasized, all participants brought to the table to reach a bipartisan agreement on this critical nonpartisan reform. That includes not only Wisconsin state legislative Republicans and Democrats, but also Gov. Tony Evers and, most importantly, the citizens and voters of Wisconsin.

We need to get redistricting reform done right and if that takes 14 weeks to accomplish after waiting 14 years for this process to even begin, then so be it.

On, Wisconsin. Forward!

Jay Heck