

Wisconsin Farmers Union continues to call for Fair Maps in the wake of SCOTUS remand

June 19, 2018

On Monday, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a long-awaited decision in the *Gill v. Whitford* case, which challenged the state of Wisconsin's Assembly district map as an example of partisan gerrymandering. The court remanded the case back to the District Court, giving plaintiffs in individual Assembly districts an opportunity to demonstrate that their constitutional right to vote was diluted by the unfair maps. With the case is going back to the lower courts, and it seems that current district maps will remain as they are through the 2018 elections.

"While we were hoping for a more definitive decision, we were encouraged by the language in the Supreme Court's decision expressing deep concern over partisan gerrymandering," said Wisconsin Farmers Union president Darin Von Ruden. Wisconsin Farmers Union has long supported nonpartisan redistricting efforts in the state of Wisconsin, with the issue being voted by members as a "Special Order of Business" since 2013.

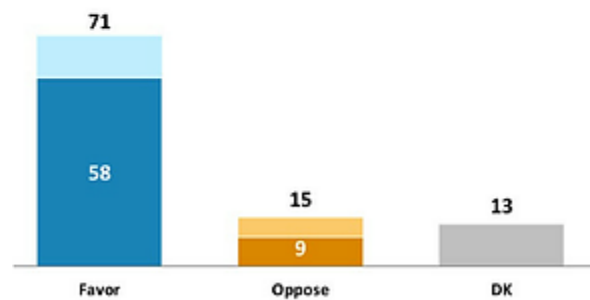
"Most Wisconsinites want members of the Legislature to work across party lines and achieve consensus. Unfortunately, the way that our legislative districts are drawn sets us up for extreme partisanship," Von Ruden said. "There is something wrong with democracy when legislators are choosing their voters and not the other way around."

The Supreme Court's decision comes amidst a groundswell of support for nonpartisan redistricting. To date, 39 of 72 Wisconsin counties have passed resolutions that call for "the creation of a nonpartisan procedure for the preparation of legislative and congressional redistricting plans."

One of those counties was Lincoln County, where dairy farmer Hans Breitenmoser was one of the County Board Supervisors who took the lead on the resolution.

"Lincoln County Democrats and Republicans stood together and said our system for drawing legislative district

Bipartisan study shows that Americans want the Supreme Court to set rules to stop partisan gerrymandering.



Source: Lake Research Partners & WPA Intelligence, September 2017



lines is fundamentally flawed and needs to be changed," Breitenmoser said.

"I am looking forward to seeing how the next stage of the legal challenge unfolds, and I and many other citizens would like to see the legislature take action at the state level to remedy this unfairness in our democracy."

Wisconsin Farmers Union supports legislation sponsored by Senator Dave Hansen and Representative Don Vruwink that would create a nonpartisan process for drawing legislative districts. Unfortunately the Wisconsin State Senate and Assembly did not hold hearings on that bill last session.

When districts are drawn to heavily favor the incumbent, as the current districts do, new candidates are deterred from running for office, and voters are denied a meaningful choice at the polls. In the 2016 elections, 38 of 99 state Assembly candidates ran unopposed in the general election. On the state Senate side, most of the races were blowouts – only 3 of the 16 elections were decided by less than 10 percentage points. "Without a legitimate electoral challenge," said Breitenmoser, "elected officials have less incentive to be responsive to their constituents. For democracy to thrive, voters need competitive legislative districts and real elections."

Von Ruden concluded on a hopeful note, observing that other states such as Iowa have created the laws, and the computer software, to draw legislative districts based on nonpartisan factors such as population, county and town borders, and contiguity of land area. "In addition to creating better outcomes for democracy, nonpartisan redistricting is also cheaper," said Von Ruden. "Taxpayers don't have to foot the bill for a multi-million dollar redistricting legal battle every 10 years."

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all citizens through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors and civic engagement. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com. Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member of Community Shares of Wisconsin.



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