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House State Government Committee Amends Hyper-Partisan Redistricting Bills to Empower Greatest Citizens Commission

House State Government Committee Chairman Daryl Metcalfe defeated liberal redistricting legislation last month.

Bolstered by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's unconstitutional decision to redraw congressional district lines, Democrats made a special motion to discharge House Bill 722 from the House State Government Committee.

House Bill 722 is a proposal to amend the Constitution of Pennsylvania to establish an 11-member citizen redistricting commission for both state and congressional districts. A constitutional amendment requires approval in two consecutive legislative sessions and then approval by the voters through a referendum.

The bill is heavily lobbied by a group called Fair Districts PA, which has expressed its support for gun control, a job-killing minimum wage increase, and pro-LGBT legislation. It is also an official arm of the liberal group, League of Women Voters.

While Fair Districts PA claims that House Bill 722 is a bipartisan bill, loopholes exist in the legislation that would leave Pennsylvania's redistricting process wide open to partisan contamination.

A thorough study of the bill, made it clear that the un-amended version of House Bill 722 would create an unaccountable, bureaucratic commission which would not be representative of all Pennsylvanians, and would remain susceptible to more partisan manipulation by an activist Supreme Court.

Chairman Metcalfe blocked the Democrat's efforts to advance their agenda by calling a voting meeting to amend House Bill 722 with his own reform proposal. Chairman Metcalfe's amendment would establish a Citizens Commission that is both bipartisan and transparent.

With commission members elected from the General Assembly, the amendment would, by nature, be truly representative of all Pennsylvania voters. In the meeting

Chairman Metcalfe said, "there is no greater citizens' commission than the General Assembly."

Democrats expressed dismay for the amendment and attempted to stop a vote on the bill. Their motion failed, and Chairman Metcalfe's amendment passed with a party-line vote and was adopted. Metcalfe chose to table the amended bill for the day.

Most importantly, House Bill 722 now reinforces existing constitutional provisions, which require a court to return a redistricting plan they find unconstitutional to the commission for revision, as they have no constitutional authority to redraw congressional maps independent from the people's legitimately elected Legislature.

Rep. Frank Ryan (R-Lebanon) expressed his support for the amendment and argued that the underlying bill that the Democrats supported is a system that is "designed to fail" and would ensure that the left-leaning state Supreme Court would continue to redraw district maps.

Ryan further stated that the underlying bill "usurps the responsibilities and rights of 13 million Pennsylvanians." Ryan concluded that Metcalfe's amendment would keep the power to redraw district lines in the hands of the Legislature, and therefore the people of Pennsylvania.

Later, Democrats made the same motion to discharge House Bill 563, a bill similar to House Bill 722, from the House State Government Committee. Again, Chairman Metcalfe called up House Bill 563 to amend it with the same amendment approved on House Bill 722. Democrats again opposed the amendment.

Chairman Metcalfe restated his position that the General Assembly is the "greatest citizens commission."

Chairman Metcalfe will continue to defend the constitution of Pennsylvania and advance legislation that maintains and restores the balance of power between the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government in Pennsylvania.

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