

Redistricting Matters—the Process Begins
LWV of Salt Lake Unit Material
January 2011

Every ten years the United States counts the number of its citizens and since, it is a representative democracy, requires the number of US Congress members to be *reapportioned* according to the population among the states. The reapportionment process has been completed and Utah will have four Congress members to represent them.

After reapportionment, state and local governments *redistrict*, drawing the boundaries for political subdivisions. Since the 1960's The US Supreme Court ruled that state legislative districts had to have approximately the same number of individuals in each district.

The 2001 Utah Congressional Redistricting Plan received national attention as one of the worst examples of gerrymandering in the country. The Utah Legislature has become more one party, partly attributable to the redistricting process in 2001. A 2007 study also noted that eight Democratic House members and two Republican were combined into districts. “On average House Republicans retained 84.17% of their districts while Democrats retained only 60.72 % of their districts. In the Senate, Republicans retained 79.81 % of their districts while Democrats only retained 54.02% of their districts.”

Bodies to be redistricted: US Congressional Districts, Utah House and Senate seats, State School Board districts, City Council districts, County Council Districts, School districts

Legislative Body Responsible for Redistricting:

Utah Legislature: US Congressional Districts, Utah House and Senate districts, State School Board

County: County Councils where applicable, school districts whose boundaries stretch over several municipalities (all but five city school districts)

City: city councils where applicable, five city school districts: Salt Lake City, Murray, Logan, Provo and Ogden.

Timetable:

The first data from census bureau has been released; this is the data which gives Utah four House Seats.

The second set of data which breaks down the figures including figures including race, age and ethnicity down to the individual census block is to to be released in a series of documents between February and the end of March. This is the data that legislative bodies will use to determine the districts.

After March 1 and until 2012 bodies will use the data to come up with their plans. The Utah Legislature has until the 2012 General Session to come up with legislative districts. Under Utah law local governments have six months to complete their respective redistricting plans. According to a Salt Lake City document, it is unlikely that the redistricting plans will be in effect for the 2011 City Council elections.

If 2001 is a precedent, the Utah legislature will not deal with the issue until after the session. A committee will be appointed, plans formulated and public hearings scheduled throughout the state. A special session will adopt the plan.

Local governing bodies will have their own schedules. Salt Lake County established a seven member advisory commission to come up with a plan. The County Commission will also be in charge of developing school districts whose boundaries cross municipal lines, e.g, Jordan, Granite and The Canyons. The Salt Lake City Commission will adopt the districts for the Salt Lake City School system. In 2001, the City Council chose to follow the school district recommendations and not have school district boundaries the same as city council districts. This was because two members of the school board would have found themselves in the same district.

The County Council Advisory committee has met once and will look at models at their January meeting.

League Involvement:

LWV Utah:

The Utah League has supported the institution of a citizen advisory committee to report the the Legislature since 1980. Bills to do this have been introduced in nearly legislative session since 2002., most of them have not even come out of Rules committee. The League has signed on to the Citizen's Council call for an advisory com.

LWV Salt Lake:

Salt Lake County has the county council, and 16 municipalities. The County Council advisory committee has begun its deliberations.

To Learn More:

1. Play the Redistricting Game at: www.redistrictinggame.org
2. Consult the Reading list from LWVUS on the LWV Utah website.

Questions for unit discussion:

1. How can League members educate themselves and others about the importance of redistricting plans? Are you willing to work on a League committee? Serve on a local advisory commission/committee if position became available?
2. What do you think are the elements for action plan to make the redistricting process at both the state and Salt County level transparent and allow for citizen participation?

