Michael Ahern’s Testimony on Proposed S.J.R No.5

1/23/2018

My name is Michael Ahern. I reside at 2507 Kemperwood Drive, Blacklick, OH. I submitting this written testimony today as a registered voter. I provided testimony on October 26, 2017 before the Congressional Redistricting Reform Working Group and will reiterate that I am not affiliated with any party. I vote more conservatively on some issues and more liberally on others. I am not beholden to any party or political ideology and I increasingly am not represented in the political process because of political gerrymandering in Ohio. My primary comment today is, as an independent, to counter the position that Senator Huffman espouses in promoting S.J.R. No5. Namely, that the U.S. Constitution empowers State legislatures with the responsibility to draw Congressional District lines.

I have enjoyed listening to Senator Huffman and appreciate his work ethic, his forthrightness and willingness to listen to alternate views. I also happen to agree with his baseline position regarding the drawing of Congressional District lines. However, I think it is important to highlight that another power, consistent with the U.S. Constitution and enshrined in the Ohio Constitution, is the power granted to citizens to initiate changes to the Ohio Constitution. Not included in the enumerated Constitutional powers until 1912, this power underpins the fundamental tenet of American law that the government is of the people, by the people. In both the Ohio and Federal Constitutions, there are checks and balances to ensure that abuse of power of any particular branch is tamped down. The citizen driven initiative process is precisely one of those checks. A check that allows citizens, through a highly prescriptive process, the ability to amend the Ohio Constitution. In this instance, the initiative being put forth by Ohio Fair Districts=Fair Elections is a check on the partisan approach to drawing Congressional District lines by prior legislatures and the political parties that were in the majority at the time.

In short,  while the legislative power to draw Congressional District lines is a Constitutional power, the ability for citizens to modify that power and the result of such a change is Constitutional at the state and federal levels. Furthermore, once approved by voters in Ohio, the citizen initiative-based result is equally valid to the State legislative powers outlined in the U.s. Constitution and, in my opinion, is better for the voters of Ohio.