**Some Suggested Themes for Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds**

**Fair Districts for New Mexico**

**WHAT IS THE PROCESS NOW?**

In New Mexico, the maps are approved by the New Mexico House of Representatives and the New Mexico Senate, then signed into law by the Governor. Oftentimes those parties cannot agree on what are the best and fair maps. They might think a map has been gerrymandered or puts their party at a disadvantage. In theory, a set of district maps would be those which the parties can agree upon. When the legislature cannot agree before their deadline, they rely on a court to draw the maps. Usually a court appoints a panel of judges who revise the legislature's proposed maps to create a final and impartial map. In the last two redistricting sessions lawsuits related to redistricting have cost New Mexico taxpayers an additional $6 million. The conflicts and lawsuits that have arisen over past redistricting in New Mexico undermine the public’s confidence in the political process.

State lawmakers are set to hold a special session in December to consider new maps. While lawmakers will be free to choose from CRC recommendations, revise, or start from scratch, it would make a mockery of the system — and a colossal waste of time, effort and input — to ignore them. Choosing a map from the CRC which has been deemed fair and impartial is the most expedient and least expensive process for the NM Legislature and Governor to follow.

**THE CRC PROCESS HAS BEEN A VICTORY FOR NEW MEXICANS**

The Citizen Redistricting Committee operated openly and provided plentiful opportunities for public comment, which they used to develop the maps that reflect the wishes of New Mexicans. The Legislature should show the same respect for the people of New Mexico by following the guidance of the Citizen Redistricting Committee.

**THE SPECIFIC ASKS OF THE LEGISLATURE**

A. Select the CRC maps that best balance:

   -Compliance with the Voting Rights Act

   -Is free of partisan gerrymandering

   -Protects Communities of Interest

   -Respects governmental boundaries including Tribal boundaries.

 -No favoring incumbents.

B. If the Legislature amends the maps sent to them by the CRC they should provide a detailed explanation of why they amended the maps.

C. During the Special Session on Redistricting all Legislative meetings should follow the letter and spirit of the Open Meetings Act aka the Sunshine Law. The public's business should be conducted in full public view. The actions of the public bodies should be taken openly and all deliberations be made open to the public. Public access to the proceedings is an essential element of a properly functioning democracy.

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**THE COUNTRY IS WATCHING REDISTRICTING IN NEW MEXICO THIS YEAR**

New Mexico has the opportunity to show other states that it can be a leader in ethical government. Our State Ethics Commission is one of the strongest in the U.S.  Let’s add to that accomplishment a fair redistricting process.

**WHAT IS REDISTRICTING? WHAT IS GERRYMANDERING?**

Redistricting is the process of redrawing the boundaries of Legislative and Congressional districts. This process happens every 10 years to adjust for population changes. Currently, legislators must draw and pass new maps like they pass any other legislation. Gerrymandering is the manipulation of district boundaries to draw a map that is not representative of the community. Sometimes this is done by unfairly favoring a political party or diluting the vote of racial or ethnic minorities. Sometimes deals are made between elected leaders to protect incumbents of both political parties.

**EVERY VOICE MATTERS, EVERY VOTE COUNTS**

Every voice in New Mexico should be heard. We must empower the electorate by passing maps which have been deemed fair by the Citizens Redistricting Committee so as not to strip voters of their voice.

**EMPOWER VOTERS TO CHOOSE**

Elections should be determined by voters, not politicians who draw maps to favor themselves. Voters should pick their elected officials, not the other way around. In our current system, politicians can draw their own district lines to pick their voters and protect themselves. The New Mexico Legislature has been given maps which were recommended by the Citizen Redistricting Committee. The Legislature should follow the recommendations.

**NEW MEXICO DOES NOT WANT TO BE NEAR THE BOTTOM IN REDISTRICTING REFORM**

New Mexico was one of the last states to create a State Ethics Commission. Let’s not be one of the last to reform our redistricting process. The New Mexico Legislature now has recommendations to follow from the Citizen Redistricting Committee for the first time in history. The Legislature should follow the recommendations.

**CONSTITUENTS SHOULD CHOOSE THEIR REPRESENTATIVES RATHER THAN REPRESENTATIVES CHOOSING THEIR CONSTITUENTS.**