



Summary of meeting with Jim Olson - The Iowa Redistricting Process

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

Thursday, May 10, 2007

Speaker - Civic Caucus member Jim Olson

Present - Verne Johnson, chair; Lee Canning, Jim Hetland, John Mooty

A. The Iowa redistricting process — In 1980, with support from the League of Women Voters, the Iowa General Assembly enacted a statutory process that provides for the Iowa Legislative Services Agency to draw congressional and legislative districts, subject to legislative and gubernatorial approval. That process, used in the 1981, 1991 and 2001 redistricting, remains intact today.

When the Iowa Legislative Services Agency prepares a plan, it is submitted to the Legislature in bill form. Under law the Legislature and Governor must accept or reject the first plan. It can't be amended. If the first plan is rejected by the Legislature or Governor, the Legislative Services Agency prepares a second plan, which also must be accepted or rejected without amendment. If both the first and second plans are rejected, a third plan is presented by the Agency. This time the Legislature is allowed to amend the plan, if it chooses. If the third plan is not adopted, the Iowa Supreme Court prepares and adopts a plan.

In 1981, the Legislature adopted the third plan, without amendments. In 1991 the Legislature adopted the first plan, and in 2001, the second plan. In 1981 the Republicans were in control of the Legislature. In the elections after 1981 redistricting, the Democrats regained control. In 1991 the Democrats were in control. In the elections after 1991, the Republicans regained control. In 2001 the Republicans were in control, but after the 2006 elections, Democrats regained control.

B. Introduction — Jim Olson, a member of the Civic Caucus, had been asked to gather demographic and voter information allowing a comparison of Iowa and Minnesota to determine if Iowa's congressional redistricting plan could be applied to Minnesota and if so, with what impact. Verne introduced Jim and called the group's attention to his E-mail in advance of the meeting that included the basic elements of the Iowa plan that are: equal population to vary by no more than 1% of the average population for congressional districts; follow county borders but if any counties had to be divided, they would be those with the largest population and the districts should be of convenient,

contiguous territory. The rules were to be applied in the order listed above.

C. Background Information from Jim - Apportionment has been based on a concept that recognizes a relatively compact core of people. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the districts had to be updated based on census information and there should be equal population for each congressional district, a pattern that also has been followed generally for legislative districts. However, there are examples of redistricting in California, New York and Illinois in which the congress members and/or their staffs designed the reapportionment districts primarily to result in the re-election of the congress members.

In some states,(e.g., Iowa, Georgia) attempts have been made to set up a series of rules for reapportionment. Some states set up a reapportionment commission with or without rules and others set up rules that would drive reapportionment in which the equal population requirement would be limited in certain ways.

Other guidelines include keeping entire counties in the same congressional district if at all possible which was a prime consideration for Iowa. In addition Iowa had a requirement regarding the shape of the district which should be compact. The Iowa Legislature passed a law regarding equality of population that required each district within one percent of each other statewide.

D. The Outcome - The Iowa Legislative Services Agency did the work on that state's redistricting. Since members of the Legislative Services Agency were employees of the legislature, the legislators remained in control of the process, raising the question: Are you willing to let a legislature continue to shape congressional districts? Such action requires having enforceable rules to insure that the reapportionment group doesn't produce its own rules that guarantee the reelection of incumbents.

E. Minnesota vis-à-vis Iowa - Jim emphasized the differences between the two states. Iowa is relatively "square" while Minnesota is twice as big north to south as it is east to west. No single county in Iowa is large enough to constitute a congressional district by itself. The population of the largest county in Iowa has fewer than 400,000 residents.

In Minnesota, Hennepin County is almost large enough for two districts by itself. Ramsey County is almost big enough for one by itself and the surrounding counties are so large that it is difficult to develop options that would include Hennepin, Ramsey and the surrounding area.

F. A Look at One Plan for Minnesota - Jim presented a possible plan for Minnesota's eight congressional districts, using numbers from the 2000 census.

Dakota County would be in the District 1 which would extend to the south to include Fillmore and Houston counties.

District 2 takes in the western portion of Minnesota taking in Rock and Nobles counties in the far southwestern corner and extending north to Norman and Mahnomen counties. It also includes Cass, Crow Wing and Morrison counties in central MN.

District 3, a south central district, has Scott, Carver, Rice, Dodge and Mower counties on its eastern edge and extends as far west as Jackson county. It includes Meeker and McLeod counties.

Districts, 4, 5 and 6 take in the metropolitan area. Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington counties make up these three districts as well as the city of West St Paul in Dakota County.

District 7 contains the north suburban counties such as Anoka, Sherburne, Wright, Stearns and Benton counties.

District 8, labeled the North district, goes from Cook County on the east to the western border of the state and goes from the border with Canada to Isanti and Chisago County.

The population splits for the eight districts, under this plan, would come out this way:

District 1—617,300; District 2—616,300; District 3—609,700; Districts 4/6—615,900 each; District 7—619,800; District 8—610,300.

G. The Outcome - The Iowa plan doesn't fit Minnesota but the review of the Iowa plan does provide a clear direction, as suggested by Jim Hetland, "It's the rules that count."

Olson did not have enough data to attempt to draw a set of legislative districts for Minnesota.

The Civic Caucus is a non-partisan, tax-exempt educational organization. Core participants include persons of varying political persuasions, reflecting years of leadership in politics and business.

A working group meets face-to-face to provide leadership. They are Verne C. Johnson, chair; Lee Canning, Charles Clay, Bill Frenzel, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, John Mooty, Jim Olson, Wayne Popham and John Rollwagen.