



**STATE SENATOR NAN RICH  
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE  
SEPTEMBER 2011**

**MESSAGE AT SUMMER REDISTRICTING HEARINGS IS LOUD AND CLEAR:  
VOTERS DEMAND FAIR DISTRICTS**

Every ten years, after the Census is taken, the U.S. Constitution requires district boundaries for state legislative and U.S. House of Representative seats to be re-drawn. District lines need to be adjusted in order to ensure that people have equal representation in their legislative bodies.

In the past, problems arose with redistricting because there were no guidelines to keep partisanship and self-interest from running rampant. It used to be that Florida's state legislators had complete discretion to draw their own district boundaries, as well as those of Florida's Congressional districts. So it was no surprise that with this sort of fox-and-hen house scenario, what was right for the voters took a back seat to political self-interest. The result was that legislators drew themselves safe seats and whichever party was in power did everything it could to expand its numbers in the legislature.

That all changed in 2010, when an overwhelming majority of Florida voters approved the "Fair Districts" amendments to the Florida Constitution. Known as Amendments 5 & 6, these new constitutional amendments bring common sense to the process of re-drawing legislative and Congressional boundaries. Here's what the amendments require:

- District lines cannot favor or disfavor an incumbent or political party
- Minority groups must have equal opportunity to elect legislators of their choice
- Districts must be compact and contiguous
- Existing city, county and geographical boundaries must be respected, where possible

Over the past few months, the Florida Legislature held public hearings in 26 cities around the state to give Floridians an opportunity to share their priorities, ideas and concerns about the

redistricting process. Hundreds of people turned out at these hearings, and the most common and emphatic message we heard from people over and over again was that they want legislators to follow the Fair Districts Amendments. They want district lines that meet the people's interests – not the politicians'. They want a legislature that reflects the ideology of the whole state, not just the extremes of either party.

We also heard from many County Supervisors of Elections, and the overwhelming consensus among them was the critical need for adequate time to prepare and distribute new district information. Most of them agree with the timeline that's been developed by the League of Women Voters, the NAACP and other groups that would require maps to be introduced within the next 30 days, so that the committee review and amendatory process could be completed by the end of the year. That would allow the legislature to vote the maps out by January 13, 2012, leaving plenty of time for the required review by the Florida Supreme Court and U.S. Department of Justice.

I believe the preparation and approval of the Congressional maps can and should follow a more aggressive timeline. While Florida's Constitution prevents redistricting maps for state legislative districts from being produced earlier than 2012, there is no such prohibition that applies to the Congressional maps. I have, therefore, urged the convening of a short Special Session during a fall committee week to approve the Congressional maps, which would require no additional expenditure of state tax dollars. I'm sure the citizens of this state would be grateful to have adequate time to get to know the districts and the candidates.

In addition, lawsuits have already been filed by people who don't support the Fair Districts Amendments. While a federal court has just thrown out one such suit, more could be filed once maps are drawn by people who don't like the way the lines are drawn. These lawsuits also take time to resolve, and can further delay the redistricting process.

If the legislature fails to heed demands of the people to prepare maps quickly and to follow Amendments 5 & 6, they would be doing Florida voters a great disservice. The last thing Florida needs is another chaotic and embarrassing election cycle. My colleagues would also be wise to remember disregarding the will of the people could come back to haunt them at the ballot box, no matter how safe a district they may think they've drawn themselves.

As always, I appreciate the opportunity to serve as your State Senator, and I welcome your comments and questions on any issue related to Florida government. Please feel free to contact my office at (954) 747-7933 or email at [rich.nan.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:rich.nan.web@flsenate.gov).