

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF VIRGINIA

MEMORANDUM

To: State Central Committee

From: Frank Leone, Chair, Standing Committee on Resolutions

Date: November 20, 2008

Re: **Resolutions Committee Report – Bipartisan Redistricting**

Under current law, the General Assembly establishes electoral districts for members of the House of Representatives, the House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate. In making these determinations they must comply with federal equal protection guarantees, but there are no restrictions on favoring political parties, incumbents, or other interests. We believe that gerrymandering is bad for voters and for the political system. Packing voters into uncompetitive districts reduces voter turnout, disenfranchises those in the minority, causes elections to be decided at the primary level, and moves the political dialogue towards the extremes.

The solution to this problem lies with the creation of a Bipartisan Redistricting Commission which would draw districts taking certain factors into account. Districts would be required to be compact, contiguous and as equal in population as is practicable. Districts should also respect the boundaries of existing political subdivisions and encompass communities of interest, to the extent practicable. The standards would also prohibit certain factors from being taken into account including the impact on incumbent legislators, members of Congress, or known candidates for office, or promotion of the interests of a political party.

The 2008 Platform of the Democratic Party of Virginia contained the following statement:

We support legislative redistricting that is fair to all citizens, that follows logical geographical and jurisdictional boundaries, and that strives to keep communities of interest intact. We support the creation of an independent, bipartisan commission for the redistricting of legislative boundaries.

The Democratic Party of Virginia re-affirms its commitment to non-partisan redistricting and urges the General Assembly to act on this issue in the upcoming 2009 session.

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From: Frank Leone, Chair, Standing Committee on Resolutions

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Re: **Resolutions Committee Report – Voting Issues**

The 2008 general election brought a record number of voters, but also made clear a number of problems. The Democratic Party of Virginia has periodically addressed issues relating to voting and elections. See, e.g., Resolution Supporting Verifiable Voting (May 2007). As part of its continuing effort to improve the election process, the Democratic Party hereby calls upon the Governor, Virginia State Board of Elections (SBE), and/or the 2009 Session of the Virginia General Assembly to address the following issues:

1. **Bipartisan Commission** – we call upon the Governor to appoint a Bipartisan Commission to evaluate current state election law and procedures, consider voting reform proposals (including issues discussed below), and to make recommendations for improving Virginia’s election system.
2. **Early Voting** – we call upon the General Assembly to enact a system of “no excuse” in-person absentee and early voting. This year’s large number of absentee voters demonstrated that many voters want the opportunity to vote early. Early voting will increase voter participation and reduce pressure on polls on Election Day. We further recommend actions to facilitate early voting including use of electronic pollbooks and satellite locations.
3. **College Student Voting** – we endorse the right of college students to register in their college community if they consider that community to be their residence. Different localities impose different requirements, including those not permitted by law, to make it more difficult for college students to register to vote. We support legislation to provide standardized procedures to allow college students to register to vote in their college communities. Such procedures should include a presumption that an address given by a full-time college student is his or her proper address.
4. **Former Offender Voting Rights** – we commend the efforts of Virginia’s governors to restore voting rights to former offenders, specifically persons convicted of non-violent felonies who have completed their sentences. In all but two states such rights are restored upon release

from the criminal justice system. We recommend that the General Assembly adopt legislation to restore voting rights for non-violent offenders after they have completed their sentences.

5. Voters with Disabilities – we recommend that the SBE facilitate the improvement of voting procedures for persons with physical disabilities. Specifically, although Virginia allows “curb-side” voting, it does not have specific procedures to facilitate the provision of such voting. Specifically, voters should be able to call a number to arrange a time to meet an election official outside of their precinct (or outside of the Voter Registration Office in the case of early voting) so that the process is not overly burdensome and does not cause physical hardship.

6. Military voting – we recommend that the SBE and the General Assembly evaluate the current situation with absentee ballots cast by members of the U.S. military, particularly those stationed abroad, and provide standardized and streamlined procedures to make sure that military personnel timely receive their absentee ballots so as to ensure they are able to submit them well in advance of the filing deadline.

7. Staffing of Polling Places – we call upon the SBE to provide increased staff and improved training and testing for election officials for the 2009 and future elections. We commend Governor Kaine for providing civil leave to state employees, which enables them to assist in the election process.

8. Sufficient Polling Places and Equipment – we call upon the SBE to evaluate and ensure that there are sufficient polling places and equipment for the 2009 and future elections, and that the equipment is fairly allocated among precincts.

9. Provisional ballots – we recommend that voters be allowed to vote by provisional ballot if they are at the incorrect precinct within the correct locality and that the ballots be counted.

10. Audits and Recounts - we call upon the General Assembly to strengthen Virginia's electoral process by allowing post-election manual audits of randomly selected machines to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the count. We commend the General Assembly for recently strengthening Virginia's recount statutes to include manual examinations of rejected ballots, and call upon the General Assembly to also include manual audits of machine results in recounts to further assure the integrity of Virginia elections.