

Press Release from...

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF CALIFORNIA

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**BIPARTISAN COALITION PRESSES GOVERNOR, LEGISLATORS TO
PUT REDISTRICTING ON NOVEMBER BALLOT**
Identifies Ingredients for New Redistricting Plan

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – A bipartisan coalition of Californians including professionals from government, academia, media, issue and community advocacy, and business who have been urging the Governor and Legislature to reform California's redistricting process this year, today provided the most specific recommendations yet on what redistricting reform should include when it next goes to the ballot.

The signatories to the latest letter include Former Congressman Leon Panetta; Former State Senate Republican Leader James Brulte; California Common Cause Executive Director Kathay Feng; Former State Assembly Republican Leader Bill Leonard; League of Women Voters President Jackie Jacobberger; Former State Legislative Analyst A. Alan Post; Former State Treasurer Matt Fong; former Chairman of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce George Kieffer; and People's Advocate CEO Ted Costa. Leading the coalition are Democrat Fred Keeley, former Speaker pro Tem of the State Assembly, and Republican Dan Schnur, former Communications Director for Governor Wilson. The Commonwealth Club of California's Voices of Reform project is facilitating the coalition's discussions.

While the recommendations in the letter are largely consistent with the text of the redistricting reform legislation currently before the Senate (SCA 3 - Lowenthal, Ashburn), the letter also recommends a number of potential improvements to the current legislation. First, the letter addresses one of the most politically charged and complicated redistricting reform questions debated over the past several months by outlining a consensus proposal for forming an Independent Redistricting Commission.

- The recommendation would empower the California Chief Justice and six California Courts of Appeal chief administrative judges to start the process, rather than the Judicial Council, by creating a nominations panel, also composed of retired judges. (These judges would oversee a process for selecting members of the public for the Commission itself, as in SCA 3.)
- After 50 applicants are identified by the nominations panel, the Legislature may strike up to eight of them -- as opposed to SCA 3, which allows legislators to both strike and pick Commissioners.
- Finally, the nominations panel would select the final eleven Commissioners randomly, preserving a political balance of four Democrats, four Republicans, and three independents. This also differs from the SCA 3 process.

In addition, the letter recommends the following:

- Require the Independent Commission to publicly disclose their rationale for any proposed district boundaries that deviate in any way from any of the redistricting criteria included in their instructions;
- Require both Commissioners and Staff be subject to clear conflict of interest restrictions;
- Prohibit Commissioners from running for any office for which they participated in drawing the boundaries;
- Require that districts of different sizes should share boundaries, also known as "nesting" (so that, for example, constituents of one Assembly member would also vote for the same Senator, rather than for two or more); and
- Explicitly prohibit Commissioners from drawing districts to favor incumbents.

(The full text of the letter can be found at: www.VoicesofReform.org.)

"The public strongly supports turning the process of deciding political boundaries over to an independent commission, and the leadership in both the Senate and the Assembly have publicly committed on numerous occasions to put a new redistricting proposal before the voters – we think this letter underscores the breadth of support for immediate action on this issue," said Keeley. In order for a new redistricting proposal to qualify for the November ballot, both houses of the Legislature must pass legislation by a two-thirds vote, by mid-August. After that, anything they pass would go on a 2008 ballot (unless the Governor calls another special election before then.)

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Schnur added, “This is an opportunity for the Legislature to send a much needed signal to Californians that they truly understand that elections are for voters – not incumbents, and that voters deserve a chance to elect representatives of their choice rather than the choice of the two major political parties.”

Signatories to the letter are part of an even larger group of professionals from around the state who have been in discussion since April about obstacles to a productive policy making environment in Sacramento, low public confidence in elected representatives, and areas most in need of reform. The coalition intends to identify additional areas of consensus to recommend as reform priorities in the near future.

About The Commonwealth Club: The Commonwealth Club was founded by Progressive era reformers, including Hiram Johnson and San Francisco Chronicle writer Edward F. Adams, in 1903. In its early years The Club drafted and promoted state legislative and constitutional reforms including those resulting in the recall amendment of 1911, the civil service system, the public defender’s office and the jury system, as well as the direct primary, permanent voter registration and absentee voting. While The Club terminated its advocacy work many years ago, it remains committed to effective California governance. (More information can be found at: www.commonwealthclub.org.)

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