
From: Todd Thomson [mailto:todd@emcampaigns.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 06, 2005 11:46 AM
To: edrcoordinator
Subject: Comments concerning Revenue Estimating Conference for proposed Redistricting Commission

To Whom It May Concern:

I have been following some of the news articles related to the proposed redistricting commission being pushed by certain special interest groups. In reviewing one of these articles I noticed a statement in which an individual claimed that establishing this sort of redistricting commission would save money fro Florida's taxpayers. As someone who has been a part of this process I find this statement laughable.

First of all, your cost for redistricting would be doubled since there would have to be two rounds of redistricting within a five year period (the first in 2007-08 to satisfy the new constitutional amendment and in 2011-12 to satisfy the decennial redraw as mandated by the Florida Constitution).

Next, you must take into consideration the additional costs that would be incurred by the fifteen unaccountable commission members from across the state of Florida. The commission will have to have a "home base", presumably in Tallahassee, to house commissioners, commission staff and computer hardware and software. This would be a new cost this is currently already built into annual budgets for the House and Senate.

The commission must have skilled staff to assist with this process. Knowing that there will be two redistricting cycles in less than five years it would seem wasteful to ramp up this staff twice in that time frame. Therefore, the commission would likely have to hire full time staff beginning in early 2007 and keep this full time staff through the year 2012. Salaries and benefits for this staff would be new costs to be covered by Florida's taxpayers.

With fifteen commission members from across Florida, there will be additional costs to cover travel and lodging to and from Tallahassee for commission meetings, meetings with staff and other commission business.

When the redistricting process begins the commission and commission staff and lawyers will travel Florida to allow the public to provide input in what they want their districts to look like. In 2001, the House and Senate held 24 public hearings across the state. To receive sufficient input, I would assume that the commission would hold at least this many public hearings before beginning to propose redistricting maps. The commission will want to have hearings to take input from the public once they start proposing redistricting plans and once final plans have been agreed upon, therefore additional

public hearings will be necessary. There will be costs associated with travel, lodging and securing facilities for the hearings.

The commission will have to secure redistricting computer hardware/software for commission members and staff. Depending on what new program(s) the commission decides on using, this new cost could be quite significant. The commission will have to gather data for the computer program twice (in 2007-08 and 2011-12).

Another major expense to take into consideration will be the legal costs associated with redistricting. The commission will need legal counsel to guide them through every aspect of this process. This means years of legal expenses beginning with the assembling of staff and selecting computer programs through all of the legal requirements associated with the redistricting process. On top of this, the threat of outside lawsuits from special interest groups, affected lawmakers and citizens affected by a new round of redistricting is quite high. This means years of additional legal costs that will have to be picked up by Florida's taxpayers.

The potential of the Florida Supreme Court ultimately drawing these redistricting maps must also be taken into consideration. The Court will have to hire outside experts to conduct this process as well as any costs associated with travel for additional public hearings or input that the Court will wish to receive.

While the commission would be responsible for the drawing of redistricting plans, it is safe to assume that the House and Senate will want to continue to participate in this process. This means that the House and Senate will have members and staff that will travel to each of the public hearings and will be engaged throughout this process.

Since redistricting directly affects the legislature, the House and Senate will also want to hire legal counsel to represent their interests. This significant cost must be taken into consideration.

With all of these additional costs, I am also concerned about the accountability of this appointed commission. While elected officials are held responsible for their spending at the ballot box, this commission could waste millions of taxpayer dollars with no accountability checks.

I hope you take my comments into account as you deliberate this matter.

Todd Thomson
Staff Director
House Redistricting Committee 1999-2003