

## Redistricting – the View from California

**By Sharon Hardee Jimenez,**

The work which led to the independent redistricting commission now being organized for the next census began when I came aboard as publicist for the 2005 Californians for Fair Redistricting. A lifelong democrat and great-granddaughter of Florida Gov. **Napoleon Bonaparte Broward** (1906-1909) my passion for government reform began in the Georgia Legislature in the late 1970's when I watched with awe the process of drawing districts that could fairly represent the state's African American constituents as the fight for political empowerment emerged after the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

In Atlanta at the capitol building, I wrote my first scripts for TV news (WXIA-TV) about reapportionment. I had begun to understand that the lines which created voting districts would determine the future of voter empowerment and inclusion of groups harmed by a long history of discrimination.

In California 25 years after my reporting in the South my media and publicity skills as founder of Icon Imaging PR in LA would be tested as I joined a team of democrats, republicans and independents determined to qualify a ballot measure and explain to voters why the idea of lawmakers drawing their own political districts was a conflict of interest and an impediment to democracy.

Progressive Republican Chairman **Bill Mundell** was soon off on a statewide campaign to convince every newspaper editor in the state that the fight for redistricting reform was not a partisan issue. My role was to set up the editorial meetings, write the news releases, and help coalition build. Explaining the complex subject to editorial boards was relatively easy compared to the coalition building we were attempting to bring to the leadership of the two major political parties that did not want to admit that the system was rigged and had to be fixed.

An opportunity emerged in Ohio where Dr. **Richard Gunther** and Reform Ohio Now had a ballot measure supported by democrats, similar to the one being championed by Mundell. Our governor, **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, arrived in Columbus, Ohio at the same time as Mundell and the head of the Committee for an Independent Voice **Jim Mangia**. A human rights and healthcare advocate, Mangia joined Mundell in Ohio to campaign for the redistricting reform ballot measure. And, soon we had hatched a plan for Ohio

State University's democratic professor Gunther to join Mundell and Mangia in a campaign for redistricting in California holding press conferences in Sacramento, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

While Proposition 77 failed in a special election in 2005 the leadership for redistricting reform had built strong non-partisan alliances and brought together groups like Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) determined to win this fight. In 2008 a new plan was put forward with our chairman Mundell joining Gov. Schwarzenegger and former democratic Gov. **Gray Davis** to lead another fight for reform.

Surprisingly it was the progressive wing of California's Democratic Party that broke ranks with the party faithful endorsing what would become Proposition 11 and achieving one of the closest votes in state history. On a glorious day in November all of us who led the fight in 2005 stood on the steps of LA City Hall in victory.

While California's new independent commission will not draw the lines for congressional districts, those of us who led this effort are determined to bring about national redistricting reform. Mundell is now executive director of "Gerrymandering the Movie." Icon Imaging PR is working with the Green Film Company and director **Jeff Reichert** in Florida interviewing **Bob Graham**, the former governor and U.S. senator, and other leading Floridians about the complex subject of gerrymandering. Look for us in 2010 as the new census begins. "Gerrymandering the Movie" is our new vehicle for bringing fair elections back to America and restoring our nation's legacy of democracy.

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