

Fineout: FairDistricts crying foul over ballot placement

From reporter Gary Fineout's Web site, [the Florida Tribune](#):

The GOP-controlled Legislature has made sure that its constitutional amendment on redistricting will appear on the ballot just behind two citizen amendments dealing with the same subject.

Even though the redistricting measure wasn't approved by state lawmakers until the final day of the session, the measure was sent to the Secretary of State's office ahead of other ballot measures that had been approved days and weeks earlier.

That means the measure – HJR 7231 – will appear on the ballot as Amendment 7. The redistricting amendments pushed by FairDistrictsFlorida.org are Amendment 5 and Amendment 6.

“It makes practical and logical sense to position HJR 7231 with the other reapportionment amendments,” said **Jaryn Emhof**, a spokeswoman for Senate President **Jeff Atwater**.

Jill Chamberlin, a spokeswoman for House Speaker **Larry Cretul**, said “there's logic to minimize voter confusion and provide clarity by positioning those three together.”

That's not how **Ellen Friedin**, the campaign chairman for FairDistrictsFlorida.org, views it. She said the decision by legislators to place all three redistricting amendments together is “one more piece of evidence that what they are trying to do is trick the voters” in an effort to protect “their own political power.”

Florida lawmakers must redraw maps for legislative and Congressional districts every 10 years. The two amendments by FairDistrictsFlorida.org would require legislators to design districts that are compact and do not give an advantage to an incumbent or someone of a particular political party. Sixty percent of the voters must vote yes for the amendment to take effect.

Legislators, however, said an additional amendment was needed to clarify the two citizen amendments, saying that if voters passed them they would be impossible to carry out. They also said that the citizen amendments could lead to a reduction of districts that can be won by minority candidates.

If approved by voters the rival legislative proposal would allow legislators to take into account “the ability of racial and language minorities to participate into the political process of their choice.” It would also allow legislators to take into account “communities of common interest.”

The legislative measure was approved largely along partisan lines on the final day of 2010 session and was transmitted to the Secretary of State's office on Tuesday. A proposed amendment to redo class size caps, SB 2, was passed on April 8 but it was not sent over until Wednesday. The class size measure will appear as Amendment 8 on the ballot.