Prepared by the North Dakota Legislative Council staff for the Legislative Redistricting Committee
June 2011

# LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING - BACKGROUND MEMORANDUM

House Bill No. 1267 (2011) (attached as an appendix) requires the chairman of the Legislative Management to appoint a committee to develop a legislative redistricting plan to be implemented in time for use in the 2012 primary election. The bill provides that the committee must consist of an equal number of members from the Senate and the House of Representatives appointed by the chairman of the Legislative Management. In addition, the bill provides:

1. The committee shall ensure that any legislative redistricting plan submitted to the legislative assembly for consideration must be of compact and contiguous territory and conform to all constitutional requirements with respect to population equality. The committee may adopt additional constitutionally recognized redistricting guidelines and principles to implement in preparing a legislative redistricting plan for submission to the legislative assembly.
2. The committee shall submit a redistricting plan and legislation to implement the plan to the legislative management by October 31, 2011.
3. A draft of a legislative redistricting plan created by the legislative council or a member of the Legislative Assembly is an exempt record as defined in section 44-04-17.1 until presented or distributed at a meeting of the legislative management or the legislative assembly. Any version of a redistricting plan created before the completion of the plan is an exempt record regardless of whether the completed plan is subsequently presented or distributed at a meeting.
4. The chairman of the legislative management shall request the governor to call a special session of the legislative assembly pursuant to section 7 of article V of the Constitution of North Dakota to allow the legislative assembly to adopt a redistricting plan to be implemented in time for use in the 2012 primary election and to address any other issue that may be necessary, including consideration of legislation in response to federal health care reform legislation.

## REDISTRICTING IN NORTH DAKOTA

### North Dakota Law

#### Constitutional Provisions

Article IV, Section 1, of the Constitution of North Dakota provides that the "senate must be composed of not less than forty nor more than fifty-four members, and the house of representatives must be composed of not less than eighty nor more than one hundred eight members." Article IV, Section 2, requires the Legislative Assembly to "fix the number of senators and representatives and divide the state into as many senatorial districts of compact and contiguous territory as there are senators." In addition, that section provides that the districts ascertained after the 1990 federal decennial census must continue until the adjournment of the first regular session after each federal decennial census, or until changed by law.

Section 2 further requires the Legislative Assembly to "guarantee, as nearly as practicable, that every elector is equal to every other elector in the state in the power to cast ballots for legislative candidates."

Under that section, one senator and at least two representatives must be apportioned to each senatorial district. Section 2 also provides that two senatorial districts may be combined when a single senatorial district includes a federal facility or installation containing over two-thirds of the population of a single member senatorial district and that elections may be at large or from subdistricts.

Article IV, Section 3, requires the Legislative Assembly to establish by law a procedure whereby one-half of the members of the Senate and one-half of the members of the House of Representatives, as nearly as practicable, are elected biennially.

#### Statutory Provisions

In addition to the constitutional requirements, North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) Section 54-03-01.5 provides that a legislative apportionment plan based on any census taken after 1999 must provide that the Senate consist of 47 members and the House consist of 94 members. That section also provides that the plan must ensure that population deviation from district to district be kept at a minimum. In addition, that section provides that the total population variance of all districts, and subdistricts if created, from the average district population may not exceed recognized constitutional limitations.

North Dakota Century Code Sections 54-03-01.8 and 54-03-01.10 provided for the staggering of Senate and House terms after redistricting in 2001. Section 54-03-01.8, which addressed the staggering of Senate terms, was found to be, in part, an impermissible delegation of legislative authority in that it allowed an incumbent senator to decide whether to stop an election for the Senate in a district that had two incumbent senators with terms expiring in different years.

As a result of concerns regarding the timetable for calling a special election to vote on a referral of a redistricting plan, in 1991 the Legislative Assembly amended NDCC Section 16.1-01-02.2 at the November 1991 special session. The amendment to

the section provided that "notwithstanding any other provision of law, the governor may call a special election to be held in thirty to fifty days after the call if a referendum petition has been submitted to refer a measure or part of a measure that establishes a legislative redistricting plan."

North Dakota Century Code Section 16.1-03-17 provides that if redistricting of the Legislative Assembly becomes effective after the organization of political parties and before the primary or the general election, the Secretary of State shall establish a timetable for the reorganization of the parties before the ensuing election.

North Dakota Century Code Section 16.1-04-03 provides that the board of county commissioners or the governing body of a city responsible for establishing precincts within the county or city must establish or reestablish voting precincts within 35 days after the effective date of a legislative redistricting.

## Redistricting History in North Dakota

### 1931-1962

Despite the requirement in the Constitution of North Dakota that the state be redistricted after each census, the Legislative Assembly did not redistrict itself between 1931 and 1963. At the time, the Constitution of North Dakota provided that (1) the Legislative Assembly must apportion itself after each federal decennial census; and (2) if the Legislative Assembly failed in its apportionment duty, a group of designated officials was responsible for apportionment. Because the 1961 Legislative Assembly did not apportion itself following the 1960 census, the apportionment group (required by the constitution to be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, the Secretary of State, and the majority and minority leaders of the House of Representatives) issued a plan, which was challenged in court. In *State ex rel. Lien v. Sathre*, 113 N.W.2d 679 (1962), the North Dakota Supreme Court determined that the plan was unconstitutional and the 1931 plan continued to be law.

### 1963

In 1963 the Legislative Assembly passed a redistricting plan that was heard by the Senate and House Political Subdivisions Committees. The 1963 plan and Sections 26, 29, and 35 of the state constitution were challenged in federal district court and found unconstitutional as violating the equal protection clause in *Paulson v. Meier*, 232 F.Supp. 183 (1964). The 1931 plan also was held invalid. Thus, there was no constitutionally valid legislative redistricting law in existence at that time. The court concluded that adequate time was not available with which to formulate a proper plan for the 1964 election and the Legislative Assembly should promptly devise a constitutional plan.

### 1965

A conference committee during the 1965 legislative session (consisting of the majority and minority leaders of each house and the chairmen of the State and Federal Government Committees) produced a redistricting plan. In *Paulson v. Meier*, 246 F.Supp. 36 (1965), the federal district court found the 1965 redistricting plan unconstitutional. The court reviewed each plan introduced during the 1965 legislative session and specifically focused on a plan prepared for the Legislative Research Committee (predecessor to the Legislative Council and the Legislative Management) by two consultants hired by the committee to devise a redistricting plan. That plan had been approved by the interim Constitutional Revision Committee and the Legislative Research Committee and was submitted to the Legislative Assembly in 1965. The court slightly modified that plan and adopted it as the plan for North Dakota. The plan contained five multimember senatorial districts, violated county lines in 12 instances, and had 25 of 39 districts within 5 percent of the average population, 4 districts slightly over 5 percent, and 2 districts exceeding 9 percent.

### 1971

In 1971 an original proceeding was initiated in the North Dakota Supreme Court challenging the right of senators from multimember districts to hold office. The petitioners argued that the multimembership violated Section 29 of the Constitution of North Dakota, which provided that each senatorial district "shall be represented by one senator and no more." The court held that Section 29 was unconstitutional as a violation of the equal protection clause of the United States Constitution and that multimember districts were permissible. *State ex rel. Stockman v. Anderson*, 184 N.W.2d 53 (1971).

In 1971 the Legislative Assembly failed to redistrict itself after the 1970 federal census and an action was brought in federal district court which requested that the court order redistricting and declare the 1965 plan invalid. The court entered an order to the effect the existing plan was unconstitutional, and the court would issue a plan. The court appointed three special masters to formulate a plan and adopted a plan submitted by Mr. Richard Dobson. The "Dobson" plan was approved for the 1972 election only. The court recognized weaknesses in the plan, including substantial population variances and a continuation of multimember districts.

### 1973-75

In 1973 the Legislative Assembly passed a redistricting plan developed by the Legislative Council's interim Committee on Reapportionment, which was appointed by the Legislative Council chairman and consisted of three senators, three representatives, and five citizen members. The plan was vetoed by the Governor, but the Legislative Assembly overrode the veto. The plan had a

population variance of 6.8 percent and had five multimember senatorial districts. The plan was referred and was defeated at a special election held on December 4, 1973.

In 1974 the federal district court in *Chapman v. Meier*, 372 F.Supp. 371 (1974) made the "Dobson" plan permanent. However, on appeal, the United States Supreme Court ruled the "Dobson" plan unconstitutional in *Chapman v. Meier*, 420 U.S. 1 (1975).

In 1975 the Legislative Assembly adopted the "Dobson" plan but modified it by splitting multimember senatorial districts into subdistricts. The plan was proposed by individual legislators and was heard by the Joint Reapportionment Committee, consisting of five senators and five representatives. The plan was challenged in federal district court and was found unconstitutional. In *Chapman v. Meier*, 407 F.Supp. 649 (1975), the court held that the plan violated the equal protection clause because of the total population variance of 20 percent. The court appointed a special master to develop a plan, and the court adopted that plan.

**1981**

In 1981 the Legislative Assembly passed House Concurrent Resolution No. 3061, which directed the Legislative Council to study and develop a legislative redistricting plan. The Legislative Council chairman appointed a 12-member interim Reapportionment Committee consisting of seven representatives and five senators. The chairman directed the committee to study and select one or more redistricting plans for consideration by the 1981 reconvened Legislative Assembly. The committee completed its work on October 6, 1981, and submitted its report to the Legislative Council at a meeting of the Council in October 1981.

The committee instructed its consultant, Mr. Floyd Hickok, to develop a plan for the committee based upon the following criteria:

1. The plan should have 53 districts.
2. The plan should retain as many districts in their present form as possible.
3. No district could cross the Missouri River.
4. The population variance should be kept below 10 percent.

Mr. Hickok presented a report to the committee in which the state was divided into 11 blocks. Each block corresponded to a group of existing districts with only minor boundary changes. The report presented a number of alternatives for dividing most blocks. There were 27,468 different possible combinations among the alternatives presented.

The bill draft recommended by the interim committee incorporated parts of Mr. Hickok's plans and many of the plans presented as alternatives to the committee. The plan was introduced in a reconvened session of the Legislative Assembly in November 1981 and was heard by the Joint Reapportionment Committee.

The committee considered a total of 12 legislative redistricting bills. The reconvened session adopted a redistricting plan that consisted of 53 senatorial districts. The districts containing the Grand Forks and Minot Air Force Bases were combined with districts in those cities, and each elected two senators and four representatives at large.

**1991-95**

In 1991 the Legislative Assembly adopted House Concurrent Resolution No. 3026, which directed a study of legislative apportionment and development of legislative reapportionment plans for use in the 1992 primary election. The resolution encouraged the Legislative Council to use the following criteria to develop a plan or plans:

1. Legislative districts and subdistricts had to be compact and of contiguous territory except as was necessary to preserve county and city boundaries as legislative district boundary lines and so far as was practicable to preserve existing legislative district boundaries.
2. Legislative districts could have a population variance from the largest to the smallest in population not to exceed 9 percent of the population of the ideal district except as was necessary to preserve county and city boundaries as legislative district boundary lines and so far as was practicable to preserve existing legislative district boundaries.
3. No legislative district could cross the Missouri River.
4. Senators elected in 1990 could finish their terms, except that in those districts in which over 20 percent of the qualified electors were not eligible to vote in that district in 1990, senators had to stand for reelection in 1992.
5. The plan or plans developed were to contain options for the creation of House subdistricts in any Senate district that exceeds 3,000 square miles.

The Legislative Council established an interim Legislative Redistricting and Elections Committee, which undertook the legislative redistricting study. The committee consisted of eight senators and eight representatives. The Council contracted with Mr. Hickok to provide computer-assisted services to the committee.

After the committee held meetings in several cities around the state, the committee requested the preparation of plans for 49, 50, and 53 districts based upon these guidelines:

1. The plans could not provide for a population variance over 10 percent.
2. The plans could include districts that cross the Missouri River so the Fort Berthold Reservation would be included within one district.
3. The plans had to provide alternatives for splitting the Grand Forks Air Force Base and the Minot Air Force Base into more than one

district and alternatives that would allow the bases to be combined with other contiguous districts.

The interim committee recommended two alternative bills to the Legislative Council at a special meeting held in October 1991. Both of the bills included 49 districts. Senate Bill No. 2597 (1991) split the two Air Force bases so neither base would be included with another district to form a multisenator district. Senate Bill No. 2598 (1991) placed the Minot Air Force Base entirely within one district so the base district would be combined with another district.

In a special session held November 4-8, 1991, the Legislative Assembly adopted Senate Bill No. 2597 with some amendments with respect to district boundaries. (The bill was heard by the Joint Legislative Redistricting Committee.) The bill was also amended to provide that any senator from a district in which there was another incumbent senator as a result of legislative redistricting had to be elected in 1992 for a term of four years, to provide that the senator from a new district created in Fargo had to be elected in 1992 for a term of two years, and to include an effective date of December 1, 1991. In addition, the bill was amended to include a directive to the Legislative Council to assign to the committee the responsibility to develop a plan for subdistricts for the House of Representatives.

The Legislative Council again contracted with Mr. Hickok to provide services for the subdistrict study. After conducting the subdistrict study, the interim committee recommended House Bill No. 1050 (1993) to establish House subdistricts within each Senate district except in Districts 18, 19, 38, and 40, which are the districts that include portions of the Air Force bases. In 1993 the Legislative Assembly did not adopt the subdistricting plan.

In 1995 the Legislative Assembly adopted House Bill No. 1385, which made final boundary changes to four districts, including placing a small portion of the Fort Berthold Reservation in District 33.

**2001**

In 2001 the Legislative Assembly budgeted $200,000 for a special session for redistricting and adopted House Concurrent Resolution No. 3003, which provided for a study and the development of a legislative redistricting plan or plans for use in the 2002 primary election. The Legislative Council appointed an interim Legislative Redistricting Committee consisting of 15 members to conduct the study. The Legislative Redistricting Committee began its work on July 9, 2001, and submitted its final report to the Legislative Council on November 6, 2001.

The Legislative Council purchased two personal computers and two licenses for redistricting software for use by each political faction represented on the committee. Because committee members generally agreed that each caucus should have access to a computer with the redistricting software, the committee requested the Legislative Council to purchase two additional computers and two additional redistricting software licenses. In addition, each caucus was provided a color printer.

The Legislative Redistricting Committee considered redistricting plans based on 45, 47, 49, 51, and 52 districts. The committee determined that the various plans should adhere to the following criteria:

1. Preserve existing district boundaries to the extent possible.
2. Preserve political subdivision boundaries to the extent possible.
3. Provide for a population variance of under 10 percent.

The interim committee recommended Senate Bill No. 2456 (2001), which established 47 legislative districts. The bill repealed the existing legislative redistricting plan, required the Secretary of State to modify 2002 primary election deadlines and procedures if necessary, and provided an effective date of December 7, 2001. The bill also addressed the staggering of terms in even-numbered and odd-numbered districts.

Under the 47-district plan, the ideal district size was 13,664. Under the plan recommended by the committee, the largest district had a population of 14,249 and the smallest district had a population of 13,053. Thus, the largest district was 4.28 percent over the ideal district size and the smallest district was 4.47 percent below the ideal district size, providing for an overall range of 8.75 percent.

In a special session held November 26-30, 2001, the Legislative Assembly adopted the 47-district plan included in Senate Bill No. 2456 (2001) with amendments, most notably amendments to the provisions relating to the staggering of terms. (The bill was heard by the Joint Legislative Redistricting Committee.) The term-staggering provisions provided that a senator and a representative from an odd-numbered district must be elected in 2002 for a term of four years and a senator and a representative from an even-numbered district must be elected in 2004 for a term of four years. The bill further included provisions to address situations in which multiple incumbents were placed within the same district and in which there were fewer incumbents than the number of seats available. In *Kelsh v. Jaeger*, 641 N.W.2d 100 (2002), the North Dakota Supreme Court found a portion of the staggering provisions to be an impermissible delegation of legislative authority in that it allowed an incumbent senator to decide whether to stop an election for the Senate in a district that had two incumbent senators with terms expiring in different years.

## FEDERAL LAW

Before 1962 the courts followed a policy of nonintervention with respect to legislative redistricting. However, in 1962, the United States Supreme Court, in *Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186 (1962), determined that the courts would provide relief in state legislative

redistricting cases when there are constitutional violations.

## Population Equality

In *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964), the United States Supreme Court held that the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution requires states to establish legislative districts substantially equal in population. The Court also ruled that both houses of a bicameral legislature must be apportioned on a population basis. Although the Court did not state what degree of population equality is required, it stated that "what is marginally permissible in one state may be unsatisfactory in another depending upon the particular circumstances of the case."

The measure of population equality most commonly used by the courts is overall range. The overall range of a redistricting plan is the sum of the deviation from the ideal district population (the total state population divided by the number of districts) of the most and the least populous districts. In determining overall range, the plus and minus signs are disregarded, and the number is expressed as an absolute percentage.

In *Reynolds*, the United States Supreme Court recognized a distinction between congressional and legislative redistricting plans. That distinction was further emphasized in a 1973 Supreme Court decision, *Mahan v. Howell*, 410 U.S. 315 (1973). In that case, the Court upheld a Virginia legislative redistricting plan that had an overall range among House districts of approximately 16 percent. The Court stated that broader latitude is afforded to the states under the equal protection clause in state legislative redistricting than in congressional redistricting in which population is the sole criterion of constitutionality. In addition, the Court said the Virginia General Assembly's state constitutional authority to enact legislation dealing with political subdivisions justified the attempt to preserve political subdivision boundaries when drawing the boundaries for the House of Delegates.

A 10 percent standard of population equality among legislative districts was first addressed in two 1973 Supreme Court decisions--*Gaffney v. Cummings*, 412 U.S. 735 (1973), and *White v. Regester*, 412 U.S. 755 (1973). In those cases, the Court upheld plans creating house districts with overall ranges of 7.8 percent and 9.9 percent. The Court determined the overall ranges did not constitute a prima facie case of denial of equal protection. In *White*, the Court noted, "Very likely larger differences between districts would not be tolerable without justification 'based on legitimate considerations incident to the effectuation of a rational state policy'."

Justice Brennan's dissents in *Gaffney* and *White* argued that the majority opinions established a 10 percent de minimus rule for state legislative district redistricting. He asserted that the majority opinions provided that states would be required to justify overall ranges of 10 percent or less. The Supreme Court adopted that 10 percent standard in later cases.

In *Chapman v. Meier*, 420 U.S. 1 (1975), the Supreme Court rejected the North Dakota Legislative Assembly redistricting plan with an overall range of approximately 20 percent. In that case, the Court said the plan needed special justification, but rejected the reasons given, which included an absence of a particular racial or political group whose power had been minimized by the plan, the sparse population of the state, the desire to maintain political boundaries, and the tradition of dividing the state along the Missouri River.

In *Conner v. Finch*, 431 U.S. 407 (1977), the Supreme Court rejected a Mississippi plan with a 16.5 percent overall range for the Senate and a 19.3 percent overall range for the House. However, in *Brown v. Thomson*, 462 U.S. 835 (1983), the Court determined that adhering to county boundaries for legislative districts was not unconstitutional even though the overall range for the Wyoming House of Representatives was 89 percent.

In *Brown*, each county was allowed at least one representative. Wyoming has 23 counties and its legislative apportionment plan provided for 64 representatives. Because the challenge was limited to the allowance of a representative to the least populous county, the Supreme Court determined that the grant of a representative to that county was not a significant cause of the population deviation that existed in Wyoming. The Court concluded that the constitutional policy of ensuring that each county had a representative, which had been in place since statehood, was supported by substantial and legitimate state concerns and had been followed without any taint of arbitrariness or discrimination. The Court found that the policy contained no built-in biases favoring particular interests or geographical areas and that population equality was the sole other criterion used. The Court stated that a legislative apportionment plan with an overall range of less than 10 percent is not sufficient to establish a prima facie case of invidious discrimination under the 14th Amendment which requires justification by the state. However, the Court further concluded that a plan with larger disparities in population creates a prima facie case of discrimination and must be justified by the state.

In *Brown*, the Supreme Court indicated that giving at least one representative to each county could result in total subversion of the equal protection principle in many states. That would be especially true in a state in which the number of counties is large and many counties are sparsely populated and the number of seats in the legislative body does not significantly exceed the number of counties.

In *Board of Estimate v. Morris*, 489 U.S. 688 (1989), the Supreme Court determined an overall range of 132 percent was not justified by New York City's proffered governmental interests. The city argued that because the Board of Estimate was

structured to accommodate natural and political boundaries as well as local interests, the large departure from the one-person, one-vote ideal was essential to the successful government of the city--a regional entity. However, the Court held that the city failed to sustain its burden of justifying the large deviation.

In a federal district court decision, *Quilter v. Voinovich*, 857 F.Supp. 579 (N.D. Ohio 1994), the court ruled that a legislative district plan with an overall range of 13.81 percent for House districts and 10.54 percent for Senate districts did not violate the one-person, one-vote principle. The court recognized the state interest of preserving county boundaries, and the plan was not advanced arbitrarily. The decision came after the Supreme Court remanded the case to the district court. The Supreme Court stated that in the previous district court decision, the district court mistakenly held that total deviations in excess of 10 percent cannot be justified by a policy of preserving political subdivision boundaries. The Supreme Court directed the district court to follow the analysis used in *Brown*, which requires the court to determine whether the plan could reasonably be said to advance the state's policy, and if so, whether the population disparities exceed constitutional limits.

Although the federal courts have generally maintained a 10 percent standard, a legislative redistricting plan within the 10 percent range may not be safe from a constitutional challenge if the challenger is able to show discrimination in violation of the equal protection clause. In *Larios v. Cox*, 300 F.Supp.2d 1320 (N.D. Ga. 2004), a federal district court in Georgia found two legislative redistricting plans adopted by the Georgia General Assembly which had an overall range of 9.98 percent violated the "one person one vote" principle. Although legislators and redistricting staff indicated they prepared the plans under the belief that an overall range of 10 percent would be permissible without demonstrating a legitimate state interest, the district court found that the objective of the plan, protection of certain geographic areas and protection of incumbents from one party did not justify the deviations from population inequality, particularly in light of the fact that plans with smaller deviations had been considered. With respect to protection of incumbents, the court indicated that while it may be a legitimate state interest, in this case the protection was not accomplished in a consistent and neutral manner. Although protection of political subdivision boundaries is viewed as a traditional redistricting principle, the court held that regional protectionism was not a legitimate justification for the deviations in the plans. The United States Supreme Court upheld the district court opinion in *Larios*.

If a legislative redistricting plan with an overall range of more than 10 percent is challenged, the state has the burden to demonstrate that the plan is necessary to implement a rational state policy and that the plan does not dilute or eliminate the voting strength of a particular group of citizens. A plan with an overall range under 10 percent may be subject to challenge if the justifications for the deviations are not deemed legitimate and plans with lower deviations have been considered.

## Partisan Gerrymandering

Before 1986 the courts took the position that partisan or political gerrymandering was not justiciable. In *Davis v. Bandemer*, 478 U.S. 109 (1986), the United States Supreme Court stated that political gerrymandering is justiciable. However, the Court determined that the challengers of the legislative redistricting plan failed to prove that the plan denied them fair representation. The Court stated that a particular "group's electoral power is not unconstitutionally diminished by the simple fact of an apportionment scheme that makes winning elections more difficult, and a failure of proportional representation alone does not constitute impermissible discrimination under the Equal Protection Clause." The Court concluded that "unconstitutional discrimination occurs only when the electoral system is arranged in a manner that will consistently degrade a voter's or group of voters' influence on the political process as a whole." Therefore, to support a finding of unconstitutional discrimination, there must be evidence of continued frustration of the will of the majority of the voters or effective denial to a minority of voters of a fair chance to influence the political process.

In 1988 a federal district court in California determined that a partisan gerrymandering case was justiciable. In *Badham v. Eu*, 694 F.Supp. 664 (1988), the court ruled that the challengers of the California congressional redistricting plan failed to demonstrate that they had been denied a fair chance to influence the political process. The Supreme Court summarily affirmed the district court's ruling without an opinion in 1989.

In 2004 a sharply divided Supreme Court addressed a challenge to a congressional redistricting plan adopted in Pennsylvania. In *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, 541 U.S. 267 (2004), four of the justices concluded that partisan gerrymandering cases are nonjusticiable due to a lack of judicially discernible and manageable standards for addressing the claims. One other justice concurred in the opinion, but on other grounds, and the remaining four justices issued three dissenting opinions. Despite the challenge being dismissed, a majority of the court--the four dissenting justices and the one justice concurring in the decision to dismiss the claim--continued to maintain that partisan gerrymandering cases may be adjudicated by the courts.

The Supreme Court again issued a divided opinion two years later in *League of United Latin American Citizens v. Perry*, 548 U.S. 399 (2006). In that decision, six justices wrote opinions and five justices agreed that partisan gerrymandering cases are justiciable. However, the court did not agree on a

standard for addressing claims and the partisan gerrymandering claim was dismissed. Thus, although it appears partisan gerrymandering cases may be justiciable, proving unconstitutional discrimination is a very difficult task for which there is no clear standard of proof.

### Multimember Districts and Racial or Language Minorities

According to data compiled by the National Conference of State Legislatures, North Dakota is 1 of 13 states that have multimember districts. Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act prohibits a state or political subdivision from imposing voting qualifications, standards, practices, or procedures that result in the denial or abridgment of a citizen's right to vote on account of race, color, or status as a member of a language minority group. A violation of Section 2 may be proved through a showing that as a result of the challenged practice or standard, the challengers of the plan did not have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect candidates of their choice.

Many of the decisions under the Voting Rights Act have involved questions regarding the use of multimember districts to dilute the voting strengths of racial and language minorities. In *Reynolds*, the United States Supreme Court held that multimember districts are not unconstitutional per se; however, the Court has indicated it prefers single-member districts, at least when the courts draw the districts in fashioning a remedy for an invalid plan. The Court has stated that a redistricting plan including multimember districts will constitute an invidious discrimination only if it can be shown that the plan, under the circumstances of a particular case, would operate to minimize or eliminate the voting strength of racial or political elements of the voting population.

The landmark case addressing a Section 2 challenge is *Thornburg v. Gingles*, 478 U.S. 39 (1986). In that case, the Supreme Court stated that a minority group challenging a redistricting plan must prove that:

1. The minority is sufficiently large and geographically compact to constitute a majority in a single-member district;
2. The minority is politically cohesive; and
3. In the absence of special circumstances, bloc voting by the majority usually defeats the minority's preferred candidate. To prove that bloc voting by the majority usually defeats the minority group, the use of statistical evidence is necessary.

Until redistricting in the 1990s, racial gerrymandering--the deliberate distortion of boundaries for racial purposes--had generally been used in the South to minimize the voting strength of minorities. However, because the United States Department of Justice and some federal courts had indicated that states would be required to maximize the number of minority districts when redistricting, many states adopted redistricting plans that used racial gerrymandering to create more minority districts or to create minority influence districts when there was not sufficient population to create a minority district. As a result, a number of redistricting plans adopted in the 1990s were challenged by white voters on equal protection grounds and the United States Supreme Court has subsequently held several redistricting plans to be unconstitutional as a result of racial gerrymandering.

In *Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630 (1993), the Supreme Court invalidated a North Carolina plan due to racial gerrymandering. In that case, the Court made it clear that race-conscious redistricting may not be impermissible in all cases. However, the Court held the plan to a test of strict scrutiny and required that the racial gerrymander be narrowly tailored to serve a compelling state interest. The Court stated if race is the primary consideration in creating districts "without regard for traditional districting principles," a plan may be held to be unconstitutional.

Through the *Shaw* decision and subsequent decisions of the United States Supreme Court, the Court indicated that unless race was the predominant factor in the creation of a district, a racial gerrymander challenge is not likely to be successful. In addition, the Court articulated seven policies that have been identified as being "traditional districting principles." Those policies are:

1. Compactness.
2. Contiguity.
3. Preservation of political subdivision boundaries.
4. Preservation of communities of interest.
5. Preservation of cores of prior districts.
6. Protection of incumbents.
7. Compliance with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act requires certain states and political subdivisions to submit their redistricting plans to the United States Department of Justice or the district court of the District of Columbia for review. North Dakota is not subject to that requirement.

## POSSIBLE ISSUES TO ADDRESS

The following are issues that may have to be addressed by the committee in beginning this study:

- What parameters should be followed in preparing plans?
- Should the committee limit consideration to plans establishing a certain number of districts?
- How should the Air Force base populations be addressed?
- How should the plan effectuate the staggering of terms of members of the Legislative Assembly?
- What will be the proper procedure for submitting proposed plans for consideration by the committee?

- How often should the committee meet?
- Should the committee meet in locations other than Bismarck?

ATTACH:1