

From the office of
Texas State Representative - Dan Flynn

THE FLYNN REPORT

Legislative Newsletter

July 26, 2003

Greetings constituents, supporters and friends:

One of the most disappointing aspects of being an elected official is that some of the individuals I work with have one goal in mind and that is to promote their own personal agenda and to build for themselves a power base. I have been reluctant to discuss this, but will now define the difference between that and what we conservatives attempted to do in this session.

I, like many of my colleagues, ran for office to make a difference. Too often one rarely has that opportunity. This 78th Legislature and the special session that we are currently serving has given us that opportunity.

I am pleased to say we have made a difference. We have changed the dialoged in Austin from, "You can't do that," to, "Yes, we can." It was said we could not pass a balanced budget without a tax increase. We did. It was said we could not have meaningful lawsuit reform. We did. It was said we could not decrease the size of state government. We did. I could go on and on of the numerous accomplishments of the 78th Legislative Session. What is happening is the many positives are being forgotten, and only the negative reports from the major news organizations are making the news.

News organizations surround the House floor while the House is in session. Upon adjournment many of the members provide the media with press releases or submit to interviews. As you can imagine, often the negative reports generally reach the public because that is what sells the news. The redistricting issue has been debated on the House floor where it passed overwhelmingly, but not on the Senate floor because the Democrats would rather debate the issue in the media rather than the Senate floor where they know they would lose. I believe the people deserve a fair hearing on this issue rather than a one sided debate. As I read the many accounts of what is happening I am again amazed with the reports. Too often, only one side is presented and the comments and thoughts of the majority in the House and Senate are not included.

The excuses being used against the congressional redistricting process are nothing more than a smokescreen. Almost 70% of Texans voted to support the President of the United States. However, more than 50% of the Texas congressional delegation opposes the President on most issues. Clearly, our delegation does not reflect the political philosophy of the majority of Texans.

Democrats controlled the State Legislature for 123 years from 1879 to 2002. They won the right by election to oversee redistricting. Republicans now control the legislature for

the first time and have a constitutional duty to redraw congressional district lines based on the last census.

Democrats have railed against the possibility of Republican Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst suspending the blocking rule in the Texas Senate to allow debate on the Senate floor on a redistricting bill. In 1992 Democrat Lieutenant Governor Bob Bullock set a precedent by suspending this rule during a special session on redistricting with no objection.

Democrats have used "rural" versus "urban" issues as an excuse to stop redistricting. The fact is, in the last ten years, the majority of the population shift in Texas was to the larger urban areas, and it is not possible to draw lines that will reflect the rural areas, as we once were able to do. Given the opportunity I believe we can draw fair districts to undo the gerrymandering currently in place, which, in effect, prevents the election of additional Republican members to the United States House of Representatives.

This week I was encouraged to read a column in the *Houston Chronicle* by a member of their editorial board. The writer did such an outstanding job of covering the issue I wanted to share his thoughts with you. The column was written by Bill Coulter a third-generation Texan, born in East Texas. I trust you will appreciate the thoughts from an outsider giving a fair and complete picture regarding redistricting.

He has given permission to reprint his comments:

It's not the Alamo. It's politics.

By: Bill Coulter

From the tone of what Democrats are saying about their resistance to Republican redistricting efforts, one would think they were engaged in some noble cause, a heroic struggle of right against wrong that recalls the courageous defenders of the Alamo.

They're not. Their primary motivation is to save Democratic votes in Congress, just as the Republicans' primary motive is to gain more seats. There's no nobility about it. It's just politics.

Texas Republicans, who are clearly the voting majority in the state, are under-represented in the U.S. House. The Democrats want to keep it that way. Democrats currently hold a 17-15 majority in the state's 32-member delegation in the House.

That does not reflect the interests of the majority of Texas voters who vote Republican. That's not fair.

Democrats accuse Republicans of wanting to disenfranchise minority voters and rural voters. Maybe redistricting would; maybe it wouldn't. One Republican plan, an

unaccepted one, would have added a minority seat. But Democrats are perfectly content to disenfranchise Republicans from fair representation in Washington, D.C.

The fact is that Texas voters have elected Republicans to all statewide offices. They have given them a majority in both the houses of the Legislature. They have chosen Republicans for the state's two U.S. senators. Voters also gave Republican congressional candidates 60 percent of the total congressional vote last year.

So why do Democrats still outnumber Republicans in the U.S. House? Because Democrats, who until recently had run the state since God made dirt, drew congressional district lines to elect and re-elect Democrats. Yes, the Democrats practiced gerrymandering, the same weird line-squiggling they are now damning the Republicans about.

Democrats demonize U.S. Rep. Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, for being behind the redistricting efforts and wanting more Republicans in Congress. They scream about Washington trying to control Texas politics.

Well, they have either forgotten or chosen to ignore the fact that U.S. Rep. Martin Frost, D-Arlington, orchestrated the Legislature's 1991 redistricting plan, producing a map that incorporated gerrymandering to the highest degree. That 1991 map is the basis of the current congressional lines drawn by a three-judge federal panel after the Legislature could not agree on new lines in 2001.

Ideally, the Texas Legislature should have redistricted in 2001 and not left it up to the federal judges. State legislatures should do that every 10 years following the U.S. Census, not judges or bipartisan panels. That's representative democracy. But the Republicans didn't control the House then, and they knew they wouldn't get even a bone from Democrats.

So now Republicans want to redistrict in order to increase Republican representation in Washington -- perhaps by five or 10 additional seats. They have a right to do so, because they are in the majority. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott has ruled that the Legislature can draw new lines.

If Republicans are successful in passing a new map, it will have to be approved by the Justice Department regarding the preservation of minority voting strength. It will also face serious challenges in the courts.

Republicans, so long the victims of gerrymandering by Democrats, shouldn't commit the same offense. They should do their best to create districts along logical lines. They should minimize, as much as possible, lines that break up cities.

Unfortunately, it appears an impossibility to avoid reducing representation in rural districts in any future redistricting, even by Democrats, because the state's population continues to shift more into urban areas. Each congressional district should contain

approximately 652,000 people, and there are fewer people these days living in rural areas.

Redistricting every time control of the Legislature changed would be harmful to the state and voters. However, the Republicans in the Legislature deserve a fair chance to redress the last balance of power set in 1991, more than a decade ago.

My staff and I welcome your input and your questions. You can reach us in our office located in the Capitol extension: **E1.324**. Mailing address: **P. O. Box 2910, Austin, TX, 78768** and our phone number is **512/463-0880**. Canton District office: **P. O. Box 999, Canton, TX, 75103** phone number **903-567-0921**. Email **dan.flynn@house.state.tx.us**.

God bless you and God bless Texas,

Dan Flynn
State Representative, House District 2