

*Open Forum* Guest commentary

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## ***Amendments Y, Z put interests of Colo., not parties, first***

By Steve Fenberg and Peggy Leech

Congressional and legislative redistricting has historically been one of the most divisive issues in our state, with fierce partisan battles and political gamesmanship demonstrated decade after decade.

But thanks to the work of lawmakers from across the political spectrum and groups like the League of Women Voters and Colorado Common Cause, we have a chance to change that this year while giving independent voters an unprecedented role in the process.

This November, voters have the opportunity to create a redistricting process that is fair, transparent and puts the interests of Coloradans—not politicians and lobbyists—first. That's why we are proud to support Amendments Y and Z, which were referred to the ballot by the legislature without a single 'no' vote earlier this year.

Amendment Y changes how we draw congressional districts, a process currently controlled by the legislature; while Amendment Z tackles legislative redistricting—currently handled by a commission appointed by legislative leaders, the governor and the chief justice of the Colorado Supreme Court.

Under our current system, redistricting can be controlled by politicians and political appointees, and the courts determine the final maps when bitterly divided partisan feuds lead to deadlock. Amendments Y and Z understand that voters choose their politicians, not vice versa, and put the focus on fair and effective representation for all Colorado voters. Y and Z call for creation of independent commissions made up of four members each from the state's largest and second largest parties (currently Democrats and Republicans, respectively), and four independent voters.

Both measures set strict limits to keep political insiders from influencing the system. And they open the process up to an unprecedented amount of public input and scrutiny. There will be public hearings throughout the process—which voters can attend in-person or virtually—and there will be online avenues to submit comments and map suggestions.

For the first time, independents, now the largest voting group in Colorado, would be guaranteed an equal seat at the table during redistricting.

Agreement among two-thirds of the commissioners would be needed to approve any map, and there's a catch—at least two of them would need to be independent voters.

That's meant to guard against the partisan commissioners redistricting to protect incumbents. It was also included to make sure Democrats and Republicans can't collude and draw maps that are equally good for the parties but bad for unaffiliated voters.

And with gerrymandering at the center of political fights across the country, Y and Z serve to protect Colorado by expressly prohibiting the practice of drawing of districts to benefit a politician or party or to limit the voices of minority groups.

Amendments Y and Z also include several components that are critical to our communities. When drawing new political districts, commission members will be directed to reasonably preserve political subdivisions such as counties, cities and towns. Districts must also be as compact as possible.

Another criterion is that 'communities of interest' are protected—for example: groups of individuals with common issues and interests like higher education, water, transportation, or geographic consideration like the San Luis Valley or Western Slope.

These measures protect minority groups by enshrining the federal Voting Rights Act language in the state constitution, which is an important check if they are rolled back at the federal level.

Amendments Y and Z were also crafted to ensure the commissions reflect Colorado geographically and demographically.

In addition, the commissions must hold at least three hearings in each congressional district—and all meetings and public comments must be shared online.

Finally, the measures call for the creation of competitive districts to the extent possible after satisfying other criteria, which means politicians will have to be responsive to more voters—not just their party base. We are joined by more than 300 individuals and organizations in supporting Y and Z. These include current and former elected officials, partisan and nonpartisan political organizations, unions, trade organizations, both major political parties as well as city and county business leaders and organizations.

In their work to educate voters on this historic compromise, [Fair Maps Colorado](#), the group behind the *yes* on Y and Z campaign, has received monetary support spanning the political spectrum.

These changes aren't about giving an advantage to Republicans or Democrats, or about benefitting one interest group at the expense of another. They are about doing what makes sense for Colorado.

Please join us in voting *yes* on Amendments Y and Z.

*Sen. Steve Fenberg (D-Boulder) was one of the cosponsors of the bipartisan measures that referred Amendments Y and Z to the ballot. Peggy Leech is president of the Boulder County chapter of the League of Women Voters.*