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Thank you so much for allowing us to speak to your commission. I'm a member of IndependentVoting.org who came from Maryland to explain why I believe so passionately that in addition to improving the efficiency of the polling station, basic election reforms are extremely important for establishing and maintaining an effective government that is responsive to the citizens.

As an American citizen, I am appalled that our government seems so hopelessly paralyzed by partisan gridlock, and I believe that this begins in the election process.

I am hopeful that you will use this opportunity to explore the deeper issues and address the problems of an election system which encourages political extremism.

I've been a registered Democrat since my first election more than 40 years ago, but became an Independent a few months ago when I realized how much each party, including mine, clings to power rather than allowing and encouraging individual legislators to come to their own decision based on the needs of their constituents.

You may ask "how does that relate to the election process?" When elections are arranged to maximize the effect of a certain party, then legislative representatives are less likely to feel the moderating pressure of a balanced constituency, and more likely to buckle under the pressure of the party that helped them get elected.

Primarily, as I understand it, this power is instituted in the election process in two ways:

1. Having the slate of candidates determined by primary elections that exclude voters who are not registered members of a given party – this has been explained so eloquently in more detail by other speakers.
2. Allowing the ruling party to draw district lines in such a way that favors the election of their candidates.

Our district lines in Maryland look like a bag of worms fell onto the floor. I live in District 4, and if I travel southwest for a mile and a half I enter into District 5, which stretches for 15 miles to my right and 60 miles to my left. But if I continue traveling SW for only 5 more miles, I am back in District 4 again.

Steve Johnson, who testified a few minutes ago, lives in District 3. He can leave his district and travel northwest through mine for about 12 miles and then SURPRISE! He's back in District 3 again, which is in the shape of an island stretching 5-10 miles to his right and to his left, and only 5 miles straight ahead.

That doesn't reflect community lines. These lines are drawn to minimize the possibility of a balanced constituency, which maximizes the need for our legislators to respond only to the extremes.

The redistricting process should be based on something that is not just out of the hands of the ruling party, and not just bi-partisan – it should be a NON-partisan system based on objective criteria.

In conclusion, these issues are important enough that we request that the Chairs of the Commission invite the leaders of IndependentVoting.org to provide a special briefing for you to discuss the democracy concerns and appropriate remedies for independents leading to an efficient, responsive government.

Thank you.