

## WGG Meeting May 6, 2019

Women for Good Government held the May meeting at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin.

Our first speaker was **Stephanie Swanson, League of Women Voters Redistricting Issue Chair and founding member of the Fair Maps Texas Coalition**. Fair Maps Texas is a nonpartisan reform effort aimed at fixing the broken redistricting system in Texas. As one of the lead organizers for the Fair Maps Texas Coalition, Stephanie coordinates legislative and advocacy efforts at both the state and national level.

Stephanie explained that the current redistricting process allows districts to be drawn (“gerrymandered”) along partisan and/or racial lines which undercuts the power and integrity of the vote. Redistricting should be based on the shared needs and interest of the community, not partisan biases.

The voting districts maps are drawn based on the Census taken every 10 years. It is imperative that everyone (citizens and undocumented immigrants) be counted in the 2020 Census to ensure full representation and fair allocation of federal funds and grants. Maps drawn according to an accurate census would show where people live and ensure the districts the same size.

The **LWVTX** supports removing the power of redistricting away from the state legislature and creation of an independent citizens redistricting commission. The commission would be bipartisan, have clear criteria for redistricting, have a transparent process, and allow for public hearings and input. Stephanie referred us to Arnold Schwarzenegger’s efforts promoting Redistricting Reform and California’s plan an independent redistricting commission.

Stephanie suggested some of the way we can help:

- Promote attendance LVW Town Hall events about redistricting
- Canvassing
- Petition
- Support local resolutions
- Letters and postcards

Q: Will citizenship questions on the census negatively affect Texas?

A: Yes. In large part because it could result in “citizen only” districts and under-reporting of residents (population) would result in losing seats in government and federal funds,

Our other speaker was **Amanda Gnaedinger, Southwest Organizer for Common Cause**. Common Cause mission is holding power accountable. She and Stephanie

work closely for the Fair Maps Coalition. Amanda spoke to us about **on-line voter registration**.

The first barrier to voting is not getting registered. In Texas problem created by not allowing on-line voter registration include:

- the 4 weeks before election day cutoff for voter registration is the longest time allowed by federal law
- county registration offices get overwhelmed
- incorrect postmarks on mail-in voter registration applications
- in 2018 – the Secretary of State disallowed 24,000 voters for no “wet” signatures

Cost of paper application include:

- Costly in materials (paper, postage)
- Inefficient – slow multi-layered, labor intensive process
- Error prone

In the Digital Age we do many tasks online including filing our taxes. Advantages of online voter registration include:

- More efficient
- Real time corrections
- Clean up voter roles
- Private information is protected huge financial saving

It is notable that Texas is the only state that required Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDR) – in every other state anyone can register others. There has also been a huge shift in party identification in state that use online voter registration.

Amanda suggested some ways we can help promote online voter registration, fight voter suppression and protect our elections:

- Fight voter protection with purge Whitley efforts by calling and writing Texas senators; call senators to make sure any nominee is properly vetted, petitions
- Lobby county election officials to sign on for online voter registration
- Elections protection – [866ourvote.org](http://866ourvote.org)
- [Commoncause.org/Texas](http://Commoncause.org/Texas)

Amanda's email is [agnaedinger@commoncause.org](mailto:agnaedinger@commoncause.org).