

Tuesday Topics February 2, 2021

Summary

Dr. Grant Armstrong, Assistant Professor, Political Science, Washburn University, spoke at our February 2, 2021, Tuesday Topics on Zoom. Armstrong graciously agreed to speak when his colleague, Dr. Amber Dickinson, was unable to present due to a scheduling conflict after Washburn started in-person classes. Armstrong presented on the topic of “Redistricting (in Kansas).”

Prior to introducing our speaker, Vicki Arnett thanked everyone for paying their dues in a timely fashion, reminded us of the [21-Day Racial Equity & Social Justice Challenge](#), and reminded everyone LWV is a non-partisan organization that does not support a political party or candidate but does support issues such as fair redistricting. Grace Wilson announced a one-year scholarship (membership) in honor of Marianne Bradford will go to Glenda Washington, hoping she will rejoin. Grace and Betsy Rohleder paid for the scholarship.

Dr. Armstrong’s presentation included a redistricting overview, redistricting at the state level, and political and racial gerrymandering. He identified problems and possible solutions.

Redistricting occurs every 10 years after the federal census. In 1961 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled it has authority to intervene in redistricting cases. That was followed by a 1964 case in which the Court ruled that Congressional districts must be equal in population (one-person, one-vote). In another 1964 case, the one-person, one-vote principle was extended to both chambers of state legislatures.

Gerrymandering draws its name from Massachusetts Governor Eldridge Gerry, who in 1812 signed a bill containing districts that favored one political party. The shape of one district looked like a salamander. Thus, the name gerrymander was coined – combining Gerry’s name with “salamander.” Partisan redistricting benefits a party at the expense of another. Racial gerrymandering results in districts that disadvantage one or more racial or ethnic groups. In 2019 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that partisan gerrymandering challenges do not fall under federal jurisdiction. Partisan gerrymandering challenges may be brought in state court. Racial gerrymandering is illegal (See the 1965 Voting Rights Act and numerous cases decided since the mid-1980s).

Redistricting in Kansas is done by the State Legislature. As with any other bill, the Governor may veto a district plan. State legislative districts enacted by the Legislature must be approved by the Kansas Supreme Court.

In 2012, the legislature did not adopt new district maps so a 3-judge panel of the U.S. District Court drew the Congressional, State Senate, and State House districts currently used in Kansas.

Dr. Armstrong answered many questions from meeting attendees. To hear Dr. Armstrong's presentation, please visit the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library website tscpl.org and view the February 2 Tuesday Topics video.