

## **The Colorado Reapportionment Commission Comes to Town**

On August 12, 2011, the Colorado Reapportionment Commission came to Durango to take comments about the Commission's Preliminary Plans for House and Senate Districts. The Commission is the body established in the Colorado Constitution and mandated to redistrict for the State Senate and House every ten years after the census. The Commission has been traveling the state to hold similar hearings and four of the eleven Commissioners were in attendance in Durango, including the only commission member from the Western Slope, who chaired the meeting.

There were no comments given relative to the Senate District Plan, with all attention given to the map for House Districts 58 and 59. All of La Plata County is currently in District 59, and would continue to be in the Commission's Preliminary Plan. Montezuma County is currently split between Districts 58 and 59, and would continue to be so in the new plan, although the District line would be drawn differently. It was this difference which was the subject of most comments.

The Commission's Preliminary Plan placed both the Southern Ute lands and the Ute Mountain Utes in District 59; currently the Southern Utes are in District 59 and the Mountain Utes in District 58. Both tribes were represented and spoke to this division. Each of them voiced a strong preference to retain the current boundaries and have each tribe in a different District. The Commissioners listened with great interest to these comments and appeared prepared to act on them by redrawing the District line as the Tribes requested.

There were comments from the Cortez County Clerk asking the Commission to consider the current Precinct lines in the County and not draw a new District line that would bisect these precincts. She indicated that redrawing precincts would be costly for the County and the Commissioners appeared responsive to this concern.

There were several comments about the possibility of drawing District 59 in such a way that it would not contain any of Montezuma County, which would be completely in District 58 instead. District 59 would run north from Durango and take in Silverton, Ouray and Telluride. The argument made for this was based on the economies of these mountain communities being more similar than that of the agricultural economy of Montezuma. The counter argument made by several speakers was the problem of travel through the mountains, especially over Red Mountain, making it difficult for one Representative to visit these counties that he or she represented.

This Commission works under Colorado Constitutional provisions, which were adopted in 1973 as a result of a ballot initiative supported by the League of Women Voters. This Constitutional provision is based on the League's position on drawing legislative districts. While the League

has taken no position on this Commission's Plans, it is gratifying to see the results of LWV study and successful action on the process in the real world.

-Trish Pegram