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Voices of Reform Coalition Welcomes Support by Both Schwarzenegger and Angelides for Redistricting Reform, Urges Action in Time for November '06 Ballot

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The Voices of Reform Coalition, a bipartisan group of Californians convened by The Commonwealth Club's Voices of Reform Project, welcomes the recent support of both Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Phil Angelides for meaningful redistricting reform, and urges the legislature to act on related legislation in time for it to be included on the November '06 ballot.

The Governor's support for the Voices of Reform recommendations, expressed in a meeting last Thursday and recently reiterated in a letter to the Coalition's Co-Chairs, Fred Keeley and Dan Schnur and Commonwealth Club CEO Dr. Gloria Duffy, hopefully signals that this issue will be a high priority during these final weeks of the legislative session.

As the folks who are monitoring this issue know, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Phil Angelides recently announced his support for Redistricting Reform as well, and Coalition Co-Chairs Mr. Keeley and Mr. Schnur point out that the support for this issue by both Mr. Angelides and the Governor, in the heat of a gubernatorial campaign, shows that what VoR has been trying to do might actually be possible –find people from both sides of the aisle who are willing to put the integrity of the processes of government and public confidence in government above partisan politics (for you cynics out there, call me to talk about the response we've gotten from policy and political pros statewide to the opportunity to play a meaningful role in this process). We appreciate the willingness of Angelides and the Governor to take this position, as well as the many individuals participating in the VOR coalition who have been dedicating considerable time to raising awareness of the importance of this issue over the past several months.

Since the failure of last year's redistricting reform proposal, Prop. 77, groups such as California Common Cause, the League of Women Voters of California, People's Advocate, AARP, and many others have been working to craft a stronger, more bi-partisan alternative. Assembly Speaker Nuñez, then-Republican Assembly Leader McCarthy, Senate President pro Tem Perata, and Senate Republican Leader Ackerman all publicly pledged months ago their commitment to sending a new and improved redistricting reform proposal to the voters in 2006, and Republican Assembly Leader Plescia also has committed to supporting redistricting reform. And voters continue to support reform – according to a Common Cause/League of Women Voters/Rose Institute Poll taken last April, 86 percent of California voters still want an open process and an end to back room redistricting deals, including over 50 percent of those who voted against last year's redistricting ballot

measure.

It's time to get this done. Voice of Reform urges the Legislature to follow the lead of their party's gubernatorial nominees on this issue, and put a new and improved proposal on the ballot this November. The language currently in circulation has been written, re-written, debated, analyzed, and revised over several months. There have been genuine public hearings (thanks to Senator Bowen and the Senate Elections Committee). Everyone with an opinion on this issue has had a chance to weigh in. The public supports this reform, and it's good policy. Frankly, it might be one of the best redistricting proposals in the country. In short, there is no reason to wait two more years to reform this process. Our legislature should lunge at this chance to give people a reason to believe Texas was the anomaly – not the norm.

*Before joining The Commonwealth Club as the Project Director of the **Voices of Reform Project**, Zabrae Valentine was a Senior Program Officer for the National Democratic Institute, working in Malawi. Prior to working for NDI, she was a Legislative Aide to U.S. Senator Tom Daschle. Ms. Valentine has an M.P.P. from the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy and a B.A. from Grinnell College in Iowa. She grew up in Sacramento.*

The Commonwealth Club was founded by Progressive era reformers, including Hiram Johnson and San Francisco Chronicle writer Edward F. Adams, in 1903. In its early years The Club drafted and promoted state legislative and constitutional reforms including those resulting in the recall amendment of 1911, the civil service system, the public defender's office and the jury system, as well as the direct primary, permanent voter registration and absentee voting. While The Club terminated its advocacy work many years ago, it remains committed to effective California governance. (More information can be found at: www.commonwealthclub.org.)



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