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EDITORIAL: Lines of compromise

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Mar. 3--As Ohio's primary approached, renewed concerns about making sure every vote counts were triggered by a new study of electronic voting commissioned by Jennifer Brunner, the secretary of state, and released late last year. By November, all touch-screen voting machines will be gone. Instead, voters will get paper ballots.

As this huge shift, affecting 57 counties and costing an estimated \$31 million, moved ahead, Jon Husted, the House speaker, renewed another plan to achieve the same goal. Far less technical and much less costly, Husted's idea is to change the way legislative and congressional districts are redrawn.

Rather than lopsided districts favoring one party over another, the speaker has in mind boundaries that promote robust competition between the parties. Husted is right -- Gerrymandered districts diminish the value of an individual's vote.

As it is, **legislative districts** are redrawn after each census by a special five-member board made up of the governor, auditor, secretary of state and a legislator from each party. Congressional districts are redrawn by the legislature.

Under a resolution introduced by Larry Wolpert, a Hilliard Republican, a bipartisan, seven-member commission would adjust legislative and congressional lines. Four members would come from the legislature, two from each party. The four would select three more members. For the first time, fostering political competition would be a factor. All that would take a constitutional amendment; Wolpert's resolution would place one on the November ballot.

Unfortunately, sensing an upturn in their party's fortunes, Democrats have been increasingly partisan in their objections. Rep. Chris Redfern, a Catawba Island Democrat who chairs the Ohio Democratic Party, says he is waiting for a legitimate request for cooperation. In truth, Republicans worked with members of a Democrat-leaning coalition to develop the proposed amendment. The coalition, Reform Ohio Now, failed in a 2005 effort to win voter approval of a similar measure.

In the end, more competitive districts would encourage a politics of the center, lawmakers driven to consider all viewpoints and find the common ground necessary to move Ohio forward on many fronts.

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