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OUR VIEWS; Revamp Districts

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California legislators should not need the promise of looser term limits to buy their support for vital redistricting reform. But a truly fair redistricting system is worth the price of putting a term-limit revision on the ballot.

The Legislature is not yet finished crafting the final details of a redistricting reform proposition, but the basic outline appears set. Legislators would no longer draw legislative districts after every decennial census, a system that puts political interests ahead of fair representation. That incumbent protection scheme would give way to an independent bipartisan panel that would draw the districts.

An unbiased reapportionment process would give voters real choices in districts now protected from any serious election challenge. A 2005 study by the **Rose Institute** of State and Local Government at Claremont-McKenna College found that such a reform would boost the number of competitive races in California. Ten seats in the House of Representatives, said the study, would be in play.

That sure beats the status quo, where just one member of California's congressional delegation has lost a general election in the past 10 years. More legislative seats would also be in play, according to the study - seven in the 80-member Assembly and eight in the 40-member Senate.

More competitive elections engage citizens who don't go the polls because they think their votes won't matter. And politicians who must campaign in a district they did not stuff with partisans need to appeal to a broader electorate.

That kind of politics leads to less polarization and more healthy pragmatism - two qualities sorely lacking in California's politics and policy-making.

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