



## Redistricting Dysfunction

By: Jeffrey Ferguson

Every ten years after the completion of the census the Constitution requires each state to review their congressional districts. Maryland neither added nor lost representation during the process. So, for this state, it could be a matter of validating current districts or trying to more appropriately allocate the approximately 722,000 people (5.7 million divided by 8) who should be in each district. These exercises present opportunities where politicians can demonstrate their sense of fairness, spirit of truly serving the public and rational thinking.

Unfortunately, neither the Governor nor his commission demonstrated any of the above. Instead what we got was a blatant move to further diminish the two party system in Maryland. Districts 2, 3, 4 and 5 were reconfigured. The most outlandish change occurred in District 3 where neighborhoods were broken-up and county as well as city boundaries were viewed as irrelevant. Parts of Montgomery, Anne Arundel, Howard, Baltimore counties get lumped together along with part of the city of Baltimore. You can't find a logical neighborhood place to vote in this hop-skip-and-jump district. House Speaker Mike Busch says that "I don't think that there is a map out there that would satisfy people". Perhaps, but we know that there is a map that people can understand and see logical boundaries, not one that defies any but political logic.

Maryland currently has six Democrat representatives in the House of Representatives and two Republicans. It has roughly a two-to-one Democrat to Republican advantage in registrations. The representation in the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate is more skewed to the Democrats. The House of Delegates has 98 Democrats and 43 Republicans. The State Senate is more heavily Democrat with 35 State Senators while the Republicans have only 12. Within the state Republicans can usually only grind their teeth at proposed legislation since they have a muted, if any,

voice in many of the bills. This move by the Governor and the Redistricting Commission potentially marginalizes them even more. Possessing a three-to-one House of Representative advantage and both Senators from the state is not enough. The Democrats want no debate on the issues either at the federal or state level.

This process called gerrymandering was named after a Massachusetts politician, Elbridge Gerry, who was among the first in the U.S. to redraw political boundaries in order to gain advantage over their opposition. It is an ugly process that brings out the worst of characteristics in the political class. Both sides do it. It doesn't make it right. But they do it whenever they get the opportunity. They figure that it is an easy means to win when the elections might be close. In other walks of life it is called "cheating" or remaking the rules once the game has started so that you win and your opponent has to struggle mightily to even get an upset victory. The end result is that the public views politicians as liars and cheaters who can't be trusted to do what is just or right.

You could say well how do we make this process a fair one when there are so many temptations for those in power to skew this to their advantage. It is hard. It seems that everybody today has their own axe to grind and wants to win at the other guy's expense. We could implement a set of rules that would at least make it more difficult to have carve up a county or city to maximize one party over the other. Granted, there are naturally occurring neighborhoods where one party dominates. But, to have to artificially make it worse makes no sense. A couple of considerations that might be part of a redistricting plan could include rules or principles like the following:

- County integrity and neighborhood integrity are to maintained as much as possible.

- No land should be placed in a different district when there is an opportunity to place that land in the same district as the neighboring land.
- Geographic areas should be kept intact as much as possible and if parceling them out becomes a necessity in order to make for more even population in districts, additions come from contiguous areas, not ones miles away.

I understand the desire to have your ideology prevail when you have great passion for your beliefs. It

doesn't mean that you have to resort to chicanery in order for your beliefs to become the latest law or regulation. Rather, you should have to earn those victories with the public by articulating your positions, your philosophies and your beliefs more effectively than your opponents. When you resort to winning by this sort of gerrymandering, you win by cheating. The public knows this. And then politicians wonder why they are held in such disdain by the public. They only need to look in the mirror.

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