

Opinion

# Time's running out for Republicans redistricting | Opinion

Posted May 19, 2020

Just about a year from now the five Democrats on Pennsylvania's Supreme Court will select an individual to join the Democratic leaders of the state Senate and House in drawing new electoral districts for every member of the General Assembly. The announcement of their pick as chair of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission will mark the beginning of the end of a long period of Republican control over the legislative redistricting process.

The last time Democrats held the power to draw new maps was way back in 1991. Running on the maps redrawn that year, Democrats gained a seven-seat majority in the House of Representatives. It didn't last long. Over the next quarter century, House Democrats have held majority control for only four years ending in 2008. GOP control of the state Senate has been uninterrupted since 1994.

Republicans often discount any connection between their 2001 and 2012 district maps and the durability of their ruling majorities in the General Assembly. They prefer to credit the strength of their candidates and their message. As for redistricting, they argue the maps simply reflect the reality of where Democrats and Republicans choose to live. It's true, of course, that more Democrats are found in urban and some suburban areas and more Republicans elsewhere. But that certainly doesn't tell the whole story.

It doesn't explain why the 2012 House map split 221 towns and municipalities among multiple House districts despite a constitutional prohibition against such divisions "unless absolutely necessary." Or, why Democrats could win over 55 percent of the statewide vote in 2018, while netting only 46 percent of the 203 seats in the House of Representatives.

Let's all agree. Partisan gerrymandering works as intended. Otherwise, why bother? The point is that the shoe is about to be on the other foot. And Democrats could be wearing that shoe for a long time given the likelihood that their party will continue to hold a majority on the Supreme Court in 2031, the next time the court will choose the person with the deciding vote on the redistricting commission.

Yes, time is running out for Republican control of legislative redistricting. It's also running out on any chance they have to reform the redistricting process before handing it over to their opponents. Reform advocates like Fair Districts PA, the Committee of 70, and others have been pushing for a constitutional amendment that would take redistricting out of the hands of legislators and give it to an independent citizens commission as many other states have done. House Republican leaders have not allowed that proposal to come to a vote. Senate Republicans passed a version in 2018, but have thus far failed to do so in the current session. Time is short, but it can still be done if Republican leaders act soon.

There is also a lot they could do legislatively to open up the redistricting process, impose tighter mapping rules and make legislative districts more responsive to voter preference.

Republicans should seize this opportunity before it's too late. If not, they will not only disappoint a large majority of voters. They'll also have no one to blame for the results of the 2021 redistricting but themselves and their own leaders.

Patrick Beaty is Legislative Director of Fair District, Pa.

## OPINION

## LETTER: Trust in citizens: Pass redistricting reform

Chris Bronder, FairDistrictsPA Published 12:08 p.m. ET May 13, 2020



FILE - In this July 14, 2018, file photo, computer mouse pads with Secure the Vote logo on them are seen on a vendor's table at a convention of state secretaries of state in Philadelphia. As alarms blare about Russian interference in U.S. elections, the Trump administration is facing criticism that it has no clear national strategy to protect the country during the upcoming midterms and beyond. Both Republicans and Democrats have criticized the administration's response as fragmented, without enough coordination across federal agencies. (AP Photo/Mel Evans, File) (Photo: Mel Evans / AP)

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

So begins the opening line of Charles Dickens' classic novel "A Tale of Two Cities." He could not have imagined how applicable his words would be in today's world.

In the midst of the worst health care and economic crises our country has faced in the lifetime of most of us, the best is truly the courage, competence, self-sacrifice and dedication exemplified by all of our frontline health care workers, food industry workers, transportation and delivery industry workers, down to our local mail carriers.

Their saving grace is awesomely inspiring and gratifying, even as to witness it breaks our collective heart. These are the strong, selfless Americans most of us believe we all are, and who are now proving we are. We are all in their debt. One we will never be able to repay in kind.

FairDistrictsPA has been advocating and working for the passage of two PA House bills (HB22 and 23) that will create an 11-member citizens redistricting commission for the drawing of our new federal and state electoral districts in 2021, following the census count. Still sitting in the House State Government committee (since April 2019!), the full House has yet to take up these bills.

One of the cynical refrains we often encounter from elected representatives when discussing these bills with them is, "Where are you going to find 11 citizens to do this?"

We at FairDistrictsPA have never doubted that there are many caring Pennsylvanians who will step up to selflessly serve our commonwealth on such a commission.

But for any doubting representatives, the answer must surely be: Look around you. You will see them everywhere. Fair-minded, courageous citizens possessing the moral rectitude solely to do right by their fellow citizens if tasked with preserving their most basic liberty: the free and equal power of their vote.

A citizens redistricting commission can be yet another example of rendering the best in us. Trust in it. Remember the nurses. Pass HB 22 and 23

<https://www.yorkdispatch.com/story/opinion/readers/2020/05/13/letter-trust-citizens-pass-redistricting-reform/5183402002/>

<https://www.centredaily.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article242754851.html>

## Letters: Central Pa. legislators stall on redistricting reform;

MAY 17, 2020 06:00 AM

### CENTRAL PA. LEGISLATORS STALL ON REDISTRICTING REFORM

COVID-19 is still here! Meanwhile, our PA legislators know we're distracted. The census is underway and voting districts will be redrawn. Let's end underhanded gerrymandered PA voting districts once and for all.

In 2011 all three maps for Congress and the PA Assembly were created by party leaders protecting seats. There was a vote for Congress without information, and no vote at all for state Assembly districts. Can legislators explain to voters why, after four years in committee, reform bills supported by 66% of Pennsylvanians, 381 municipalities and 23 counties still languish?

Solutions are ripe, but our central PA legislators stall. Representatives Conklin and Irvin co-sponsored bills, but perhaps just to placate us. Rep. Borowicz won't meet or return calls or emails. Rep. Benninghoff meets but says an Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission might be biased. Compared to party leaders? Really? Senator Corman, despite saying he supports reform, takes no action. At a recent online town hall, he twice disconnected a constituent who asked about redistricting.

Redistricting should be a transparent public process that meets strict criteria for fairness to all constituents. Choose candidates who will support these reforms. Check out their survey responses at Fair Districts PA Know Before You Vote.

Voting districts will last for 10 years, long after COVID-19. President Trump requested extending the deadline to deliver population counts used in redistricting. The state government committees should use this time to move reform bills to passage.

Gerrymandering leaves voters impotent. Pass reform for healthy government and legitimate representation.

Debra Trudeau, State College

# The Times

---

Opinion

## Letter to the Editor: Bills to end gerrymandering still stuck in committee

Posted May 27, 2020 at 12:15 AM

In the advent of the new coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, our legislators have been considering a flurry of bills. Some bills have been genuinely needed to respond to this crisis. Dozens more push hyper-partisan agendas while the public isn't watching. Many of these bills have no clear public support, no public input, no expert testimony.

For more than three years, as active members of our local Fair Districts PA group in Beaver County, we have been urging our legislators to pass bills to establish an independent citizens redistricting commission to put an end to partisan gerrymandering. Four crucial bills, HB22, HB23, SB1022 and SB1023 are stuck in committee. These bills represent years of discussion, research and civic engagement. They have more co-sponsors than any other bill in both this session and the last. They have never been given a vote.

An independent citizens redistricting commission would foster a less divided, more responsive Legislature that is better able to meet the many challenges that confront our state. Surely HB22, HB23, SB1022 and SB1023 deserve a vote before our legislators break for the summer. Visit [fairdistrictspa.com](http://fairdistrictspa.com) to help us end gerrymandering.

Jennifer Wood, Aliquippa

(This letter to the editor also was signed by Susan Fudurich, Monaca; Karen and Mark Hoenig, Chippewa Township; Dorothy Holtzman, Beaver; Becky and Don Kretschmann, New Sewickley Township; Michele Morris-Donner, Beaver; Robert Steffes, Aliquippa; Doris Steppe, Hopewell Township; and Paul Wommack, Hopewell Township.)

[https://www.readingeagle.com/opinion/letters-to-editor/letter-lawmakers-need-to-act-on-redistrict-legislation/article\\_eebac106-976f-11ea-8af9-073f34ede58d.html](https://www.readingeagle.com/opinion/letters-to-editor/letter-lawmakers-need-to-act-on-redistrict-legislation/article_eebac106-976f-11ea-8af9-073f34ede58d.html)

## Letter: Lawmakers need to act on redistricting legis



**READING EAGLE**

---

### Letter: Lawmakers need to act on redistricting legislation

Editor:

It's been a roller-coaster ride with one setback after another for Fair Districts PA and all the volunteers who have worked so hard to bring to fruition the House and Senate bills to resolve the gerrymandering situation in Pennsylvania.

The state House was called back into session despite the coronavirus to consider many bills of dubious priority. Yet House Bills 22 and 23 and Senate Bills 1022 and 1023, the legislation needed to set up an independent commission for redistricting, were not among them.

These bills represent years of discussion, research, advocacy and civic engagement. An independent commission would be an important first step toward more responsive representation to ensure districts are fairly drawn to represent the constituents that are being served.

With a tight timeline looming, it is time to ask why these bills are being ignored. With the chaos in Washington it is more important than ever to ensure a fair election process. Remember that redistricting is a once-a-decade process, and if we do not get a fair hearing now, another decade is lost. The Republicans hold sway in the Legislature right now, but it could very easily be the Democrats that call the shots 10 years from now. If the Democrats gain the majority in November, why would they want to give up their newfound power?

Readers must make their voices heard and find out where their representatives stand. Tell them Pennsylvania needs fair elections no matter who holds the majority.

Mary Ann Mack

Phoenixville



6/3/2020

Readers' Views: Let's not let redistricting reform be a casualty of COVID-19 | Opinion | timesherald.com

<https://www.readingeagle.com/tncms/asset/editorial/40e06186-953e-11ea-95d6-fb69a7a8b1bb/>

## **Readers' Views: Let's not let redistricting reform be a casualty of COVID-19**

Let's face it, partisan gerrymandering works as intended — that's why it happens. And the result leaves voters with legislative leadership who promote partisanship even during a pandemic.

Time is running out to fix the problems in the redistricting process. If the Republican leadership in Harrisburg does not allow legislation to move forward, the process will not change, but the players will.

Without redistricting reform, the Republicans will cede control of drawing the state legislative district maps to the Democrats. The five Democratic justices on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court will select an individual to join the Democratic leaders of the State House and Senate to draw and gerrymander the state legislative districts to their partisan advantage.

In the meantime, the (presumably) Republican majority in the General Assembly will continue to draw and gerrymander the congressional maps to their partisan advantage.

Both scenarios are antithetical to representative democracy. Despite wide spread bi-partisan support in the legislature and among the citizens of Pennsylvania for an Independent Citizens Commission to take redistricting out of the hands of legislators, the House Republican leadership has not allowed the proposal to come to a vote.

Time is short. If Republican leaders act soon, an Independent Citizens Commission could be in place in time for the next redistricting. There are also numerous legislative actions that could be taken to improve transparency, to tighten mapping rules and to ensure that legislative districts are more responsive to voter preferences.

The Republican leadership should take advantage of the opportunity to reform the process before it's too late. If not, a large majority of Pennsylvania's voters will be disappointed and the toxicity of gerrymandering will continue.

To learn more about anti-gerrymandering efforts and to find out where candidates stand on redistricting reform, visit <https://www.fairdistrictspa.com/>

—Ruth Yeiser,

Lower Frederick Township