

The Future of Wisconsin is Now

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Sen. Jeff Smith writes about last week's public hearing on the GOP redistricting plan. During the public hearing, it was abundantly clear that Wisconsinites oppose these gerrymandered maps.

MADISON - Wisconsinites deserve fair maps. I'm sure you've heard me say this once, twice or maybe a hundred times over the last few years. The redistricting process is well underway, and I hope you're paying attention because what's happening now will determine the direction of our state for decades to come.

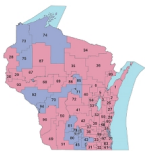
Every ten years political districts must be re-drawn based on Census data. Assembly, senate and congressional district lines are adjusted to accommodate population shifts and to ensure each district has approximately the same number of citizens. There are three Assembly districts in each Senate district and Wisconsin has eight U.S. Representatives. It all sounds simple until you realize the district lines are drawn by legislators who will benefit by staying in power.

Many of us would agree that politicians shouldn't pick who they want to represent. Other states have found a way to make the process fairer by having a nonpartisan commission draw the

maps. Seems like a sensible decision that would be less likely to be corrupted by power-hungry politicians.

The Majority Party in the Legislature has yet to relinquish the power of drawing their own district lines. Back in 2011, Republicans controlled majorities in both houses and the governor. They took full advantage of their opportunity to gerrymander our state and hold legislative majorities for the next decade.

Current Plan with 2012 General Election Results



Well, here we are again—another decade and another chance to get district lines done fairly. Unfortunately, Republicans introduced another set of maps back in October that are just as gerrymandered – if not worse – than the ones they passed in 2011. There was a public hearing held just last week on the proposed maps; during the hearing, the Republican authors even admitted to using the 2011 gerrymandered maps to draw manipulated district lines and protect their incumbents.

The good news is Wisconsinites turned out in a big way to oppose Republicans' gerrymandered maps. Wisconsinites lined up, crowded the hallways and filled overflow rooms to have their voices heard. As a member of the committee, I was inspired to hear from constituents who made the long drive, waited all day to speak out against these maps. After nearly nine hours, ALL of the citizens who testified opposed the gerrymandered maps.

The gerrymandered maps will soon be voted out of committee and passed by the Majority Party. Like any other bill, the governor has the right to sign or veto the legislative and congressional redistricting plans. Governor Evers has indicated he is likely to veto a redistricting plan if it's anything like the gerrymandered maps we currently have.

Before Republicans even introduced their maps, lawsuits were filed from both sides. Republicans are confident the Wisconsin Supreme Court will allow them to gerrymander our state again. Democrats filed in federal court and hope the federal court will step in to help Wisconsin have fair maps.



This is a critical moment in our state history. It was obvious that last decade's gerrymander would have ramifications long after the maps were approved. Republicans have clung to power and continually reject any attempts to adopt a more equitable process.

The People of Wisconsin spoke loud and clear during last week's public hearing: we must reject these gerrymandered maps. I hope the Republican Majority honors Wisconsinites' demands and goes back to the drawing board. If Republicans get their way with the Wisconsin Supreme Court, it will be another decade and then another decade and another and ... forever. One person, one vote is in jeopardy.

The gerrymandered Majority has no fear of voters, so I'm worried they'll ignore Wisconsinites once again. I have seen it time and again, gerrymandered districts make legislators unaccountable and lazy. This is simply unpatriotic. We are at a crossroad right now that will determine if Wisconsin will be held hostage by one party, or the People of our great state will have their voices heard. It's all happening now, so make sure you're following along.

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