

On November 4, the Republicans on the House Special Redistricting Committee presented their suggestion for New Hampshire's new Congressional districts map. The NH House districts maps were offered by both parties as well, but the Congressional map generated the most discussion and reaction by far.

If you have been reading any of the NH news sources since then, you know that the Republicans made drastic revisions to New Hampshire's two Congressional districts. By moving the towns of Portsmouth, Dover, Somersworth and Durham from district 1 to district 2, and adding some solidly Republican towns along the southern border of the state to district 1, the Republicans have proposed a gerrymandered Congressional map so that district 1 is far more likely to elect a Republican and District 2's Democrat lean is stronger than ever.

What they did: The Republicans moved 75 towns or city wards and 365,703 people into a different district, about a quarter of NH's population. This is the biggest change in our congressional districts in over a century.

Backing up a bit: a change had to be made because the population increased more in what is the current District 1 towns. The Democrats solved it by moving just one town--Hampstead--from district 1 to district 2. That evened out the population to within about 50 people. Thus the Republicans' drastic changes can be attributed not to necessity but to something else...in this case, partisan bias.

Historically New Hampshire's two Congressional districts have swung back and forth from Republican to Democrat and back again. In 2011, when the last Congressional redistricting was done, both seats were held by Republicans who drew the districts so that both would, presumably, remain equally competitive with a slight Republican edge for each. But...as happens in politics...their plans were not perfect. The 2012 election saw both men unseated by Democrats. Since then District 1 has gone back and forth twice, while Rep. Annie Kuster (D) in District 2 has held her seat since 2012.

As a non-partisan political organization, League of Women Voters is appalled by the blatant attempt to make District 1 a Republican win by gerrymandering. We began to take notice last January 23, when Republican party chair Stephen Stepanik said publicly, referring to the Republican majority in the NH legislature, "Because of this [Republican majority] we control redistricting. I can stand here today and guarantee you that we will send a conservative Republican to Washington DC as a Congressperson in 2022." Yikes!

On Thursday in the redistricting committee meeting, Rep. Robert Lynn of Windham, a Republican and former Supreme Court chief justice who should know better, said, "Were political considerations something that were in the mix? Of course they were. This is a political process as the Supreme Court has said repeatedly, both the New Hampshire Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court." *Darned right, which is why we've been arguing for nearly 20 years for an independent redistricting commission, I thought. And when political advantage is the reason for partisan districting, court cases are sure to follow.* After Rep. Lynn's statement, even some of the Republicans looked uncomfortable. A few of them attempted to justify the major shift in towns, but frankly, their reasons made no sense.

So where do we stand? On Tuesday Nov. 9 starting at 10 and on Wednesday Nov. 10 starting at 5 pm, a public hearing on all the proposed maps released so far will be held in the State House, in Representatives Hall. The public will be allowed to testify but no zoom testimony will be facilitated for those with health concerns.

The following week the 15 members of the House Special Committee on Redistricting will meet in executive session to decide which maps will advance to the full House for a vote in January.

Will some of the Republicans decide the public outcry against gerrymandering outweighs the partisan edge they are trying to create in District 1?

Will a third version of Congressional districts be brought forth as a compromise?

Will the Democrats' version, with its shift of just one town, make the most sense when the full House votes in January?

See for yourself: This is the link to the redistricting committee's webpage.

http://40.71.6.248/house/committees/committee_websites/Redistricting_2021/plans.aspx

Click on Congressional Maps on this page and scroll to page 11 to see the GOP version that has inspired the charges of gerrymandering. Also on this webpage are links to the NH House district maps by counties, and the county commissioner district maps (the least controversial with little difference in most cases between Dem and GOP proposals).

On the same webpage find your own county in the list and click on it to see the proposed maps. You know your town and your county. Do the new districts make sense? Only the reasoned arguments of the voters are likely to make a difference at this point. Voice your concerns and your suggestions, then before January make sure your own representatives know how you want them to vote in January. The League of Women Voters never support or oppose any candidates or parties, but we do call out injustice when we see it, and the Congressional map under consideration is gerrymandered.