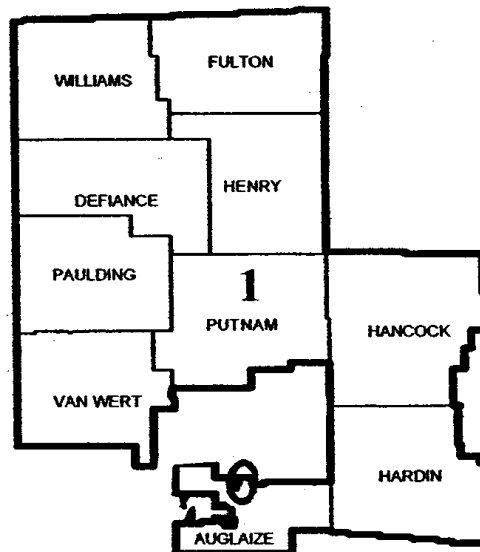


Crush the Dread Ohiomander!

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Move over, Elbridge Gerry. You've been outdone by the Ohio political manipulators who drew Senate District 1, a draconian monster so bloodthirsty that it is actually craning its neck around in order to bite itself on the rear end. Your anemic gerrymander was nothing in comparison to this savage beast, which will be forever known in American political terminology as the ... **Ohiomander!**



**Ohio Senate District No. 1
(slightly embellished)**

Ohiomandering – formerly known as gerrymandering – gives those in control of the redistricting process the power to enhance their representation by the principle of Unite and Conquer: The ruling party is given disproportionately many carefully shaped districts in which it has a safe but narrow majority, while opponents are concentrated in a few districts where they are an overwhelming majority. Thus in Ohio, Republicans won the last two presidential elections by only slim margins, yet have locked in a 22-11 majority in the Senate and a 61-38 majority in the House, thanks in large part to their control of the redistricting process.

Ohiomandering can easily be kept in check by means of a constitutional requirement that each General Assembly and Congressional district be reasonably compact, in terms of a mathematical restriction on the relationship of its perimeter to its area. Under an effective compactness limit, many districts will still be safely Republican, but a larger number will be safely Democratic, and far more will be up for grabs, than at

present. Drawing the map will still be a political football, but will no longer give last year's victor a 34-point advantage going onto the field.

Last year, voters wisely rejected State Issue 4, which would have moved us in precisely the wrong direction. This referendum would have ranked proposed district maps according to a "competitiveness number" designed to measure political instability. It then required that the most "competitive" plan be adopted, no matter how crazy.

Issue 4 would have actually mandated Ohiomandering in the name of political instability, instead of reducing it. Some stability in politics is in fact a good thing, since it prevents political fads from wiping out the loyal opposition altogether in a single election.

This May, House Republicans put forward their own proposed redistricting amendment, but with the same basic flaw as Issue 4. It would have required the proposal with the most "competitive districts" to be adopted, as defined in terms of the partisan point spread in three recent elections, and did nothing to ensure compactness. Fortunately, it also failed to pass.

The compactness of a district can easily and precisely be measured by its Perimeter Ratio, the ratio of its adjusted perimeter to the square root of its area. A perfect square has a PR of 4, but that would be too restrictive. A maximum PR of 5 would accommodate a 4x1 rectangle, and would provide plenty of legitimate latitude for drawing districts.

The original Ohiomander itself, Senate District 1, has a PR of 7.0. With a maximum permissible value of 5, it would be compelled to slither back to Michigan, whence it undoubtedly came in the first place.

These compact General Assembly districts should be drawn by a bipartisan commission like that proposed for supervising elections in last year's Issue 5, which unfortunately did not pass – Three members would be appointed by the governor, and three elected by General Assembly members not of the same party as the governor, including any independents and third party members. The seventh member would be elected by members the Supreme Court, and thereby contribute at least a facade of judicial impartiality.

The May Republican initiative would have placed redistricting in the hands of a superficially similar, but inbred, bipartisan commission – Four of the members would represent equally the two major parties, but the other three would be incestuously appointed by the first four. The commission should not appoint its own members, and should not constitutionally exclude independents and third party members from the process.

There was one real spark of genius in the Republican proposal, however: It would have locked its 7-member commission in the subbasement of the State House until

a supermajority of 5 agreed on a plan. This would solve the problem that the fourth member of a bipartisan commission might not really be politically neutral.

When a district boundary follows a natural waterway or lakefront, the actual boundary could generate a lot of perimeter without enclosing much area. In this case, the actual perimeter should be replaced, for purposes of computing the Perimeter Ratio, with an adjusted perimeter consisting of straight line segments no more than 10 miles long, whose endpoints lie on the actual boundary. The effective area is then that enclosed by the adjusted perimeter. Otherwise, districts should contain no empty Lake water, except that required to connect inhabited islands to the mainland.

In order to hold the number of counties that are broken up to a minimum, it would be simple to add a provision that a redistricting plan may not be adopted if another plan endorsed by any two members of the commission and meeting the compactness requirements breaks fewer counties.

Don't even get me started on the "dumbbells" who devised Senate District 33!

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