

Tom Pyne
Susquehanna Township Commissioner
Comments before the House Republican Policy Committee
Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Members of the Policy Committee; Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

By way of introduction, I'm Tom Pyne. While I am not here today to speak for my township or board of commissioners, I have been a commissioner for 10 years in Susquehanna Township.

I am also a retired employee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, having served the caucus for 35 years beginning 40 years ago. That afforded me a close perspective on four legislative reapportionments, beginning in 1980.

I'm here today to register my strongest objections to the **House** reapportionment plan recently approved by the Reapportionment Commission.

On the day she helped push this plan through the commission, the Democrat Leader of the House indicated it was designed to correct past reapportionments which hurt her party. But this plan is not simply an 'eye-for-an-eye" type of political justice, it's much worse than that.

(An understanding of the Old Testament reveals the concept of "eye-for-an-eye" was actually an IMPROVEMENT over the previous way of responding to an offense or perceived offense. Previously, if a man had a sheep stolen, he might respond by killing the other man's whole flock, and **then** burning down his barns. This proposed house plan isn't an eye-for-an-eye. They're killing your flock and burning down your barns.)

I believe the House portion of this proposed plan to be destructive of democracy and unconstitutional.

In fact, research shows this reapportionment plan is the most disruptive in the history of Pennsylvania legislative reapportionments. Never before, in a Pennsylvania Reapportionment, has a plan forced this many incumbents to run against each other. In fact, this plan deviates from past practice which was to only run incumbents against each other in areas of **declining** population. This plan effectively disenfranchises hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvania **voters** who supported incumbent representatives in past elections.

But make no mistake, this plan disenfranchises **Republican** voters far more than Democrat voters. In **Dauphin** County, those who voted two years ago for Rep. Andrew Lewis in the 105th District and those who voted for Rep. Joe Kerwin in the 125th District find their districts combined.

In the current 104th district, the plan presents a serious disservice to voters like me -- and 20,734 others -- who voted for state Rep. Sue Helm. Since Democrats could not defeat her in the last eight elections, they are instead attempting to win by stacking the deck against her by creating a district designed to **defeat** her. This would be a significant loss for my township as Rep. Helm has been very responsive to the public officials who serve Susquehanna Township. She has helped us to obtain millions of dollars of state grants for infrastructure long before infrastructure became a Washington buzzword.

And this partisan reapportionment plan creates OTHER problems in Dauphin County. This plan is the first to split Lower Paxton Township. In fact, a member of the Lower Paxton Board of Supervisors told me today that **that** board will likely vote tonight **for** a resolution objecting to the split.

This plan is also the first to split the **City of Harrisburg** since the 1970s when the city was too large to fit in a single district. Splitting a municipality without a legitimate reason is unconstitutional. **Political** gerrymandering is the only reason for these splits! Plus the Harrisburg split divides a **minority** community reducing the likelihood that a member of **that** minority could be elected. This appears to be **illegal**.

I am very familiar with the city district. Thirty-six years ago, I lived in the City of Harrisburg, and ran for the 103rd District, which included all of Harrisburg and portions of Swatara Township and Steelton Borough. I later supported two African American candidates who ran for the same seat a total of three times. In one of the cases, an African American woman very nearly defeated a white male incumbent. While an African American has yet to represent Harrisburg in the state House, that district – the current 103rd – includes a population of more than 46 percent blacks, compared to 38 percent whites.

The PROPOSED reapportionment plan would split Harrisburg into two districts, one which would cross the Susquehanna River into the West Shore. The NEW districts would have black populations of only 22 percent and 31 percent – again, compared to 46 percent in the **current** city district. This process of breaking up the black vote is called “cracking” and would result in dilution of a minority population. That’s specifically prohibited by the Voting Rights Act under the US Supreme Court case *Thornburg v. Gingles* decided in 1986.

In addition to this concern about racial discrimination, there also are mathematical problems with this House Reapportionment plan. This plan unfairly **increases** the number of **Democrat** districts by UNDER-stocking them and **decreases** the number of **Republican** districts by OVER-stocking them. Specifically, this plan produces **Democrat**-leaning districts with a collective population **SHORTFALL** of more than 50-thousand, and **Republican**-leaning districts with a collective population **OVERAGE** of more than 50-thousand. This appears to violate the 1964 one-man-one-vote decision of the US Supreme Court, *Reynolds v. Sims*.

I urge the Policy Committee and the individual members who constitute this committee, to do all in their power to oppose this plan and ensure that a constitutional plan is adopted.

Thank you.

#

#

#