

redistricting plan is Illinois legislature protection plan

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I strongly agree with the Chicago Tribune's editorial below

CHICAGO TRIBUNE EDITORIAL BOARD

It's never surprising when politicians say one thing and do another. It's also never surprising when politicians put their own interests above the interests of everyday people.

That's the case with Democrats, and the pledges they made on the campaign trail that they would carry out legislative remapping that was nonpartisan, transparent and fair. Gov. J.B. Pritzker made the same commitment during the 2018 campaign, vowing to veto any redistricting process that was partisan.

Then, earlier this year, they reneged on the voters of Illinois. Democrats huddled in a secret room in the Capitol complex, relied on incomplete numbers from the U.S. Census' American Community Survey program, and rushed to Pritzker's desk a legislative remap aimed solely at solidifying Democrats' stranglehold on the General Assembly.

The new map is anything but fair and nonpartisan. In some cases, boundaries were recast to toss GOP incumbents into the same district, forcing them to run against each other in the primary. One candidate would be eliminated — the other would go into the general election with depleted campaign funds and resources.

Pritzker signed the remap into law, exposing his campaign pledge for what it was — empty rhetoric.

Republicans called the backroom gerrymandering unconstitutional. But Democrats, who control the House, Senate and governor's office, exuded a "what-me-worry" confidence about their actions. "We are not going to abandon our constitutional responsibility, period," Illinois House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch said in late May. "We are not going to let Republicans gridlock the process, solely for political gain. It's not going to happen. Not here. Period."

Now Democrats find themselves hemming and hawing about their handling of the remap — a process rushed through solely to maximize political power and reliant on demonstrably flawed population estimates. Recently released 2020 U.S. Census data show enough of a difference between the ACS estimates and actual population statistics to warrant a revisiting of the remap process.

Welch and Senate President Don Harmon, an Oak Park Democrat, have asked lawmakers to return to Springfield on Aug. 31 for a one-day special session to amend

the legislative map Pritzker endorsed in June. A series of public hearings will be held before the end of the month on the issue of remap revisions.

Democrats are trying to explain away this development as a minor hiccup. The Democrat-engineered remap Pritzker signed in June was “drawn with the best data available at the time,” said Sen. Omar Aquino, D-Chicago, chair of the Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee. “Now that the long-awaited census data has arrived, we will make adjustments as needed.”

But it’s not a minor hiccup. What Aquino and his fellow Democrats conveniently forget is that the once-every-10-years redistricting exercise has the aim of empowering people to choose their politicians, rather than the other way around.

Remaps are crucial to governance at every level — federal, state, county, local. They define the superstructure for so much governmental decision-making — everything from taxation and education policies to infrastructure priorities. And remaps can, if done in a nonpartisan way, establish a bulwark against one-party rule.

That is, unless one party hijacks the redistricting process, as the Democrats did in 2011 and as they did once more this spring. When that happens, voters lose trust in politics and politicians. Remaps should be steppingstones for voters to exercise the new clout that population changes can bring. They shouldn’t be turned into partisan bludgeons that perpetuate the dominance of one party over another.

Will this dynamic ever change? It can, if voters speak up. Voters can take part in upcoming Redistricting Committee public hearings and call for the shelving of the current, partisan remap and the adoption of a fair, transparent, nonpartisan legislative map. Here’s a link for those hearings.

They can also call for something else.

For years we have urged lawmakers to put on the ballot a referendum asking voters to approve an amendment to the state constitution that overhauls redistricting in Illinois. If enacted, it would bring an end to what we call the “incumbent protection plan,” the current setup that corrodes politics in Illinois and undermines voters’ say. Passage of the amendment would create an independent citizens commission that would oversee the decennial remap process, and ensure it happens transparently.

The interests of voters would supersede the interests of politicians. That’s certainly not the case now. But it should be.

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