

Honorable members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing today and for listening to my testimony. You have been charged with an important task. You will establish a map that will determine not just the Illinois' political power at the federal level, but more importantly will help shape the political climate of our great state.

I am not going to give you my resume, but I think presenting my background will help shape the context of my request. I am a disabled veteran and small family farmer in southwestern Illinois. I am proudly represented by Representative Greenwood. I spent close to two decades in service to our country starting with my time as a cadet at The Citadel, flying helicopters as an army aviator, and serving within the special operations community before coming back to Illinois to scratch a living out of the ground between Freeburg and Mascoutah like five generations of Funks before me.

I deployed seven times in support of combat operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. I have three advanced degrees to include a masters in security studies. I am also an elected member of my local school board. I have devoted my life to not just being a part of the political process, but understanding how it works, what happens when it doesn't, and how to piece it back to together when it shatters. War is politics by other means.

We cannot take our great experiment in self government for granted. Democracy is under attack and is being whittled away by forces that want to see it fail. Americans want to see government that works for them and by and large don't see a political process at the federal level that can do anything except yell at each other and point fingers. We are a nation increasingly at odds with each other and being sucked into polar opposite echo chambers of hyper partisan rhetoric increasingly filled with lies and misinformation Our media platforms have learned how to monetize rage.

We need reform. We must wrestle with the role we have as market participants and a self-governing people with platforms like Facebook that are coded to maximize profits and subsequently fuel discontent, conflict, and in Myanmar – outright genocide.

We need election reform like rank choice voting to encourage a more diverse and engaging ballot with more choices and better candidates. The political spectrum is a kaleidoscope – not bipolar – and like the marketplace – more choice means better results.

We must increase the number of congresspersons. When our country was founded one member of the US House of Representatives represented 30,000 citizens. Now one member represents around 750,000. Our representation at the federal level is grossly diluted. How can one person adequately work

for, listen to, and represent the interest of such a huge swath of people? A larger federal slate of representative would yield a more diverse, expansive, and equitable distribution of power capable of actually getting work done.

This committee and its members have little or no immediate power to enact many of those changes now, but they are things I want you to consider and be mindful of as you do the work of our state. You do have the power to draw the federal map of our state for the next decade and I ask that you draw a map that puts us on the right path, because the one currently proposed does not do that.

One look no further than the concrete corridor that is the proposed 13th and the rural monoliths of the 12th and 15th districts to see that this is a gerrymandered map. I want to be perfectly clear about my political leanings and party affiliation. I am a democrat and ran as such in 2020 to represent IL's 12th Congressional District. I am also a Democratic Precinct Committeeperson.

I am aware and understand why the map looks the way it does, but that doesn't mean it is right. This is the kind of map that convinces more Americans that their vote doesn't matter and pushes those that still bother to vote further apart into tribes unable to communicate with each other.

Packing and cracking the electorate into slivers of blue and blobs of red is destroying our country – not healing it. We are sacrificing the long-term health of our political system for short term partisan gain. This map puts Americans into not just opposing political tribes, but competing economic interests as well. It expands the rural-urban divide. This is not a path we want to continue to go down. I challenge you to look into the recent history of places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Yugoslavia, and Syria. Their conflicts are all rooted in tribalism, mistrust, and an imbalance of power. This map reinforces what already exists and makes it worse.

I would also present to you a prediction. The party that passes a map that looks like this might gain or maintain influence in the next election, but it will be short-lived. You need only look at the recent county and local elections in downstate Illinois to see what I mean. The current trend is not our friend. More and more of our state is coming under one party rule and a political monoculture. When everyone thinks alike and dissent is not permitted – innovation and competitiveness dies.

I didn't spend the better part of my life fighting in countries where the political process and government failed to see it happen here. I implore you to do the right thing for our country and our state.

Draw a map with strategic vision that advances our state's interests – not for the next election cycle and political fiefdoms.
Thank you for your time.