Exhibit 18

https://www.sentinelsource.com/opinion/editorial/sentinel-opinion-gerrymander-north-the-republican-drawn-executive-council-map-somehow-made-a-bad-situation/article_42c26c53-8227-5bc6-99ce-5febfca3968f.html

Sentinel Opinion: Gerrymander north; The Republican-drawn Executive Council map somehow made a bad situation worse

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The redistricting square dance continues in Concord, and the latest step called by the Republicans controlling it in the Legislature was not an allemande left or right, but a gerrymander north.

Redistricting occurs every 10 years following the national census and is overly subject to the whims and self-interest of whichever political party controls the Legislature. Despite pledges by Republican legislative leaders that the process now underway would be more transparent and responsive than in past cycles, the redistricting maps that have emerged thus far are anything but.

The initially proposed map that has received the most attention — redrawing the boundaries of the state's two congressional districts — would have more than 25 percent of New Hampshire's voters change districts for no discernible reason other than to ensure the 1st District becomes safely Republican, at the expense of Republican voters in the 2nd District. So blatant were legislative Republicans in their intent, that Republican Gov. Chris Sununu has pledged to veto the map and suggested his own map with the goal, he said last week, of keeping the two districts "competitive."

Equally troublesome, however, are maps proposed for the various state offices, and these will have a far more immediate impact on decisions affecting New Hampshire residents. One case in point are the proposed districts for the Executive Council, a body with considerable power to curtail any governor's executive authority. Last week, Sen. Jim Gray, the Rochester Republican who chairs the special redistricting committee, unveiled a revamped map that, he crowed, was responsive to public complaints about the committee's original proposal to keep the Executive Council districts unchanged. Of the current districts, the snakelike District 2 that slithers in a narrow band from Hinsdale through Keene and Concord over to the Seacoast, has long been condemned as egregious gerrymandering. Sununu himself expressed reservations about it, and complaints about the district predominated public comment on keeping the districts unchanged.

So how did Gray respond to the public input? Under the guise of addressing complaints about District 2, he trotted out a map last week that would pivot the district onto its head in a swath packing towns in the southwest from Hinsdale and Winchester with towns along the Connecticut River all the way north through Hanover and Lebanon to Littleton and Bethlehem, and even up to Bretton Woods in Coos County. Instead of the current snake, District 2 would become an equally reptilian, Komodo dragon standing on its head, with one leg extending into Keene and Peterborough and the other into Merrimack County to Concord.

How brazen. Gray's map responds to complaints about the unrepresentative nature of District 2 by making it even more so. Instead of the current district where municipalities in this region share little common interest with Seacoast towns up to 110 miles to the east, now Keene and western towns in the region would share as little common interest with towns up to 150 miles to the north. Sadly, the only seeming rationale for the latest map is to pack even more Democratic-leaning communities into a single district in an effort to keep the other four council districts safe for their Republican incumbents — in short, to replace gerrymander east with gerrymander north.

Having thumbed his nose at the public input, Gray announced his map last Tuesday, and, with no public input on it allowed, it has now been railroaded through the Senate and sent on to the House. Tellingly, the map was too much even for Littleton Republican Sen. Erin Hennessey, who would see towns in her Senate district severed from the rest of the North Country and realigned with parts of the Monadnock Region, and she was the lone Republican to join all Senate Democrats in opposing Gray's map. Adding a baldly cynical note, the only other Republican voicing dissatisfaction with Gray's map seemed to be current District 5 Councilor David Wheeler, who said of the map, N.H. Public Radio reported, "it's not as good for Republicans as it should be."

Sununu deserves credit for making good on his previously stated concern about redrawing the congressional districts map for unfair partisan advantage. In threatening to veto the Legislature's proposed map, though, he stressed the importance of keeping the two districts "competitive." In the case of the state offices, a standard for redistricting other than competitiveness would better serve residents, such as geographic, school district, health services or other common interests. But in lieu of only purely partisan self-interest, electoral competitiveness will do.

Even by that standard, the Senate's proposed Executive Council map fails. If the House also passes it, Sununu should acknowledge it simply replaces a bad map with a worse one and tell the Legislature to promenade home and start the redistricting square dance over.