

## Continued Gerrymandering Games

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***Senator Smith discusses recent developments in the fight for fair maps and how we can approach redistricting with an eye to incorporating public comment and lessons learned from other states.***

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MADISON - The most common question I get as a state legislator is "Can't you all just work together?" In this terribly divided country we're living in, that's a big ask. But it's abundantly clear that people want their elected officials to work things out together.

Last week we were treated to the perfect illustration of why we aren't working together. The Republican Speaker of the Assembly, Robin Vos (R-Burlington) called a press conference in the middle of a floor session on Tuesday for an important announcement. Of course we were all curious what the important announcement might be, so I went to the room to find out. As it turned out, Speaker Vos announced he had come to the realization that Wisconsin needed to adopt a redistricting plan like what Iowa had. He wanted us to know that he had been thinking about this over the weekend.

After over a decade of continual opposition, the Speaker's epiphany was shocking to say the

least. Wisconsin has gerrymandered political maps that heavily favor Republicans. Only a reformed system of redistricting where legislators don't approve their own maps would cure this problem, and this isn't it.

The Iowa redistricting law was the standard-bearer back when I joined Representative Spencer Black to introduce redistricting reform in 2009. As the Assembly Committee on Elections Chair at the time, I was there when we held our first and only public hearing on the bill. It's common for legislation to take a couple tries and plenty of public input before it becomes law. But sadly, after Republicans took control of the Governor's office and both houses of the Legislature and approved maps heavily lopsided in favor of Republicans, there was zero chance of redistricting reform.



While Speaker Vos has been conjuring a path to redistricting reform, he was issuing threats to impeach Justice Janet Protasiewicz before she takes any action on the court. Now the Speaker is convening a secret panel of former justices to help justify his decision to start an impeachment proceeding of Justice Protasiewicz, who was elected by an 11% margin (a landslide in Wisconsin politics).

Speaker Vos is using an outdated version of the bill from 2013 for a reason. The bill I authored in 2021 would draw maps and approve them in the most nonpartisan way allowed under current law. If the Speaker and other Republicans cared about redistricting, they could have made a good-faith effort to reach out to those of us who have been working on this issue for years. If they had done so, they would've known that in response to public input and other states' innovations, we are seeking to further update the bill in preparation for 2030. My co-author, Representative Deb Andraca (D-Whitefish Bay) and I are engaging good-government stakeholders to create a new Wisconsin model of redistricting modeled from all the other states that have passed redistricting reform.

