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## Residents tell commission that voting districts leave them disenfranchised

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HAGERSTOWN — The head of the Grinch comes to mind when Randy Buchman looks at his congressional district map.

The Washington County resident told a panel on Monday that the head-shaped area, which encompasses the city of Frederick, was included in his district, District 6, for one reason only: to include more Democratic voters.

“It is not the Grinch who stole Christmas,” he said, “but rather the head of the donkey that stole the 6th District away to the predominant state party.”

Buchman was one of about a dozen residents who spoke to the state’s redistricting reform commission on Monday about their concerns about the way the state’s congressional and state legislative voting districts are drawn.

The commission is holding a total of five regional meetings across the state. About 40 people attended Monday’s meeting, which took place at Hagerstown Community College.

Republican Gov. Larry Hogan set up the commission to examine how Maryland draws its voting districts, tasking the group to come up with a proposal for how to make the process more independent and less political. The commission will make recommendations in November.

Many residents on Monday, along with three Washington County legislators, told the commission they feel disenfranchised by the way District 6 was redrawn in 2012.

When lines are redrawn for political benefit, not for better representation, “The people end up suffering,” said Jesse Pippy, of Frederick.

### Commission task

The commission was briefed Monday on how redistricting works in the state.

Redistricting is normally done every 10 years, shortly after the release of the U.S. Census. The next census will be released in 2020.

The governor submits a plan to the Maryland General Assembly, which then votes to create the districts. If residents oppose the new districts, they can petition the new law by collecting signatures from 3 percent of registered voters. The referendum then goes on the upcoming election ballot as a question for voters, who can either approve or reject the law.

Jodie Chilson, of the state's Office of Policy Analysis, explained to the commission how, in the past few years, legislators have proposed several bills that would create an independent commission that would offer a proposal for new districts. The bills outline various processes for how the maps would be approved.

Those bills have not made it out of committee, she noted.

Voters in Western Maryland and southern Frederick County — traditionally conservative regions — were represented in the U.S. House by Republican U.S. Rep. Roscoe Bartlett for 20 years until the 2012 election. Now, the District 6 representative is John Delaney, a Democrat.

Kai Hagen, a Democrat and former Frederick County commissioner, said he likes his current representative, but he still thinks the current districting is wrong.

“We need to have more Democrats with the courage to say, this has to change,” he said.

The commission's co-chairman, Walter Olson, of New Market, said he has heard these concerns before. But not all members of the commission had, he said after the meeting.

One member of the commission “was surprised at how deep the issue ran,” Olson said.

After Hagen spoke, commission member and Sen. Joan Carter Conway, who was appointed to the commission by the Democratic president of the Maryland Senate, asked him why, if the congressional districts are such a problem, voters consistently approve the maps when faced with ballot questions.

Across the U.S., the minority party in each state is going to take an issue with the maps, she said, but the voters still approve them.

Redistricting is both a Democratic and Republican issue, said Washington County Sen. Andrew Serafini. “How do we depoliticize something that is, by nature, political?” he asked the commission.

Serafini said if district lines were not manipulated as they were, voters would be more balanced, so politicians would be more moderate. The districts as they are drawn now are polarizing, he said. “In the end, we sometimes lose that middle ground.”