



## **Frustrations Aired Over Montgomery's Congressional Borders; At commission hearing, voters say they have been confused by shifting district lines**

Dan Schere

February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019

During the 2012 election, Mary Lanigan said she was an election judge at a Gaithersburg precinct and many voters had no idea who to vote for, because their congressional district had changed.

The election was the first following the 2011 redistricting of Maryland's eight districts, which included incorporating parts of Montgomery County's 8th District into the 6<sup>th</sup>, which stretches to the far reaches of Western Maryland.

Lanigan was one of about 30 people who attended a public hearing Thursday night at Montgomery College in Rockville to give testimony to a nine-member nonpartisan redistricting commission set up by Gov. Larry Hogan.

The commission was created in response to a federal court ruling in November that states Maryland must redraw its congressional districts in time for the 2020 election.

In a court challenge, Republican voters argued the 6th District was gerrymandered to include more of Democratic Montgomery County, diluting the voting power of the more conservative Western Maryland counties.

"I love Western Maryland, but truthfully my interests [in Montgomery County] differ from those in Allegany and Garrett counties," Lanigan said.

Ann Hingston, the chairwoman of a Bethesda Republican club, noted that there are three precincts along Seven Locks Road located in the 6th Congressional District. Interstate 270 is the line of demarcation between the 6th and 8th Districts. Hingston said this has been "terribly confusing" for voters during the last four years.

"There's no reason why three precincts with a Bethesda address should be in congressional district six," she said.

Dick Jurgena, a former chairman of the Montgomery County Republican Party, said he fears that the 6th District's urban and rural districts are not represented, and that candidates, such as

District 2 County Council member Craig Rice, must cater to different audiences depending on where they are speaking.

“It’s a conflict of interest,” he said.

Former Republican candidate Amie Hoeber, who ran unsuccessfully for the 6th District seat during the last two election cycles, also pointed out that the culture of Western Maryland differs considerably from that of Montgomery County. She empathized with the Republican voters who felt disenfranchised.

“You want every person in the current district six and the future district six to believe their vote actually counts,” she said.

Others who spoke also pointed out that redrawing the 6<sup>th</sup> District would also involve redrawing other neighboring districts. The U.S. Supreme Court has currently stayed the lower federal court’s order, and will decide this spring whether Maryland must redraw its districts in time for the next election. Regardless, the state must undergo redistricting following the 2020 census.

Commission co-chairman Walter Olson, a Republican and fellow and the Cato Institute think tank, said in an interview afterward that the commission is a “demonstration project” as to how redistricting should be done, regardless of whether the map they come up with is ultimately adopted.

“These are efforts of public input and transparency where we can demonstrate some of the ways redistricting should have been done by the whole state,” he said.

Olson, who lives in Frederick County, said he empathizes with many of the voters he heard from Thursday night.

“It makes politics more frustrating and more remote and more of an insider’s game when you can’t guess easily what district you’re living in, and whether you should organize your neighbors because they’re in three different districts,” he said.

Alexander Williams Jr., a former federal judge and Prince George’s County Democrat, said the commission heard similar testimony at its first public hearing in Frederick last month.

“People are concerned about counties being split... they don’t want them separated into different congressional district,” he said.

The commission will hold one more public hearing in Western Maryland and submit a map to the governor in late March. Ultimately, any new map must be approved by the legislature.