



Groups keep pressure up to stop partisan gerrymandering

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Elbridge Gerry was born 273 years ago Monday, but Common Cause, the League of Women Voters and the Hogan administration don't want Maryland to forget the long-dead governor of Massachusetts, who gave his name to partisan drawing of legislative lines.

The good government groups, joined by Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford, celebrated their second Gerrymander Meander Sunday with a tame version of a pub crawl that took them to four restaurants into four different congressional districts along a 13-mile stretch of Baltimore City and County.

It started at the Le Bistro du Village in the city's Mount Washington area in the 3rd Congressional District. Rutherford, who lives in the 3rd CD in West Columbia 20 miles away, said "everywhere is almost the 3rd congressional district," since it spreads as far south as Silver Spring and as far east as Annapolis.

The first Gerrymander Meander in 2014 had runners marathon hundreds of miles around the sprawling 3rd District, but that was too exhausting, said Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, executive director of Common Cause who organized the event.

Gov. Larry Hogan has been pushing for an independent commission with no politicians to draw the congressional map after the next census, replacing the current highly partisan process.

Reform will be introduced again

"We will introduce it again" in the next session, Rutherford said. It was rejected in one committee vote this year.

Instead the legislature passed what Rutherford called a "phony redistricting plan" calling for a semi-independent commission appointed by legislative leaders, but only if five other neighboring states did the same thing.

Hogan vetoed that measure.

"I don't think they're going to bring it up again," said Rutherford.

A panel of three federal judges in Baltimore is currently examining a challenge to Maryland's redrawing of the 6th Congressional District.

According to a Washington Post story, “federal judges on Friday sided with Republicans challenging Maryland’s electoral map, saying there is convincing evidence that the state’s Democratic leaders intentionally drew voting boundaries to make it easier for their party to pick up another congressional seat.

“One judge described the politically motivated mapmaking as ‘nefarious activity,’ ” said Post reporters Ann Marimow and Josh Hicks.

“Maryland is now in the national eye,” said Walter Olson, a Cato Institute fellow who co-chaired Hogan’s redistricting reform commission that recommended the changes the governor has pushed.

The Supreme Court has already agreed to take up a Wisconsin case of Republican gerrymandering by the legislature. Olson speculated that the Supreme Court could consolidate the Maryland case with the Wisconsin case.

“People are really keeping their eyes on the U.S. Supreme Court,” Olson said. “Next year, the whole country will have its eyes on gerrymandering.”

Bevan-Dangel said, “The pressure we’re building is beginning to tip that way,” in favor of eliminating partisan drawing of congressional and legislative districts.

Olson said Hogan’s redistricting reform commission will hold new hearings in the fall in the city and Montgomery County, two jurisdictions where the commission did not hold public hearings two years ago.