

Testimony of Stephen Kenny (Allegheny Regional Hearing)

To whom it may concern,

To begin, it is shortsighted to limit the testimony to "the geographic area in which you live". A shared understanding in the original and still valid purpose for the representation by population density in the House of Representatives and the parallel distribution of power to elect the President and Vice President via the Electoral College system is critical for a meaningful discussion. Unfortunately, the average voter cannot even name the three branches of government, let alone have an informed discussion on the Census, redistricting, and the Electoral College system. This opportunity should be taken as a way of educating our children in school about our system of government.

That being said, the "Framers" clearly intended to maintain a significant amount of individual State autonomy by providing for 2 Senators for each State, by providing a method of amending the Constitution via State Legislatures (Article V), and by giving States the full authority to control election laws within their boundaries just to name a few important Constitutional examples. However, the framers had to balance individual States' rights with individual citizen's rights of voting and representation. The representation of each state within the House of representatives was and still is proportional to population.

It is my understanding that redistricting is a necessary process whereby representation in the House and in the Electoral College is reconciled with population shifts every 10 years following the results of the latest Census. The problem here becomes the method by which district boundaries are changed. This is the question and the whole point to the testimony here. What is fair? What makes sense? Can new boundaries even be fair? Fair to some is not fair to others. We cannot expect everyone to be satisfied, yet still we must redraw.

Living in rural Beaver County, concepts that I think should be considered in the redistricting process include: not dividing up agricultural regions, not diluting suburban and rural communities votes by lumping small enough sections in with heavy urban areas, keeping regions with interdependent local economies grouped together as much as possible, distributing mostly unrelated industrial areas between as many districts as possible, and distributing key infrastructure as widely as possible.

Farming in PA is still a very important part of the state's economy. For instance regional farms in Beaver, Lawrence, and Butler Counties help keep cost of living down near me by providing local sources of food. These farmers should have ample representation in Congress to deal with farming issues to maintain this local and regional benefit. In a similar and overlapping way, suburban and rural residents tend to have very different issues than urban citizens and thus should have adequate representation on their issues. For instance, traffic infrastructure and crime prevention certainly are a larger concern for urban centers than for rural areas, while the logistics and cost of school transportation per student will likely be more of a burden in rural areas. Industrial and commercial areas along the Ohio River and main highway arteries where interdependent should, if possible, be grouped together and where unrelated should be separated in different districts. Where interdependent it would make sense for instance that those living

near and working in Ellwood City Forge in Ellwood City and New Castle (where steel is shipped from one mill to the other regularly) should have the same representative as their lives are largely affected by many of the same forces. To prevent individual representatives gaining disproportionate financial support for elections, unrelated large industries/commercial areas should be distributed as evenly as possible. A House candidate with multiple fortune 500 companies in his district will likely have more lobbyist influence than one with none. In a similar way, key infrastructure should be distributed between as many districts as possible to spread potential influence and power as evenly as possible.

In closing, first, in the spirit of the separation of powers, I firmly believe the courts should not intervene in redistricting. The success of a political party is largely due to ideas and hard work reaching the voters. This tends to even things out in the end in a relatively slow process. The Judiciary should not interfere with this process. Second, I see race as an irrelevant and false construct, a relic of old-world myopia and governance that does not belong as a categorizing data point within government in any way. Modern DNA science has revealed how insignificant the differences are between people of even the most disparate natures. Considering race outright or under the guise of culture, religion, native language, or any other way can only perpetuate whatever racism still exists in the United States in my opinion and should be avoided. This includes redistricting. Balkanizing regions via the redistricting process does not promote national unity in any way. Unfortunately, some of the concepts that should be considered will be competitive if not nearly contradictory, but each is vitally important in my opinion.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Steve Kenny
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