

Testimony of Bill Bretz (Southwest Regional Hearing)

This year's redistricting process will require removing one congressional district from the map and conventional thinking suggests it will impact western Pennsylvania. Westmoreland County is in the middle of a band of Southwestern PA Counties including Washington, Greene, Fayette, Somerset, Bedford, and extending to Armstrong, Indiana, and Blair that are similarly yoked by history, economics, and values that are ideally suited to be constituents in any proposed configuration of congressional districts.

The majority of Southwestern Pennsylvania has a common economic heritage rooted in coal, coke, glass, rail, forestry, and agriculture and an economic future prominently featuring natural gas and supporting industries, transportation, coal, and agriculture, all anchored by a vibrant entrepreneurial base of small business owners driving development with Allegheny County and its large metropolitan area and suburbs serving both then and now as a consumer of the goods and services from the surrounding area and a significant contrast with its more rural neighbors.

The differences between the majority of Southwestern Pennsylvania counties are manifest in the patterns of political party affiliations seen in voter registration trends in recent years with Allegheny County becoming more democratic and all surrounding counties becoming Republican majorities after decades of change. While congressional districts must shift due to the census results the most desirable configurations retain a consolidation of counties in a manner similar to those currently configured which best captures the economic interests and social values of the regions.

The inclusion of any portion of Allegheny County in a district with Westmoreland County would compromise the representation of both populations because the interests of the populations are so divergent and would serve only to dilute the voices of the minority area of the developed district.

My preferred congressional district for my home county is one that encompasses all of the current 14th District as well as the eastern portion of Westmoreland County and the portion of Cambria or Somerset required to meet the requirement for district population because it would preserve our voice in Washington by ensuring that the district shared common interests and needs throughout.