

Testimony of Kenneth Lee (Northeast Regional Hearing)

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak to the State Government Committee today to talk to you about drawing northeast Pennsylvania's Congressional district lines. I come before you today merely as a private citizen from Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania speaking on my own behalf. However, thirty years ago, from 1989 to 1994, I had the honor of being a member of this same House State Government Committee, having been, at the time, the Republican State Representative from the 111th legislative district consisting of all or part of Sullivan, Wyoming, Bradford and Susquehanna counties. Given this experience, I know how drudgerous it can be to listen to hours upon hours of repetitive committee testimony. With this mind, I will attempt to keep my comments as brief as possible.

I come before you today to request that this committee adopt a Congressional redistricting plan for northeast Pennsylvania which is based upon fairness and common sense rather than upon partisan political considerations. I believe it is unfortunate that the Pennsylvania Supreme Court felt compelled to take over the Congressional Redistricting process a decade ago. However, it is hard to argue that the maps originally proposed and adopted by the Pennsylvania legislature were not blatant attempts to redraw district lines solely to favor one political party over the other rather than any honest attempt to draw districts lines in a common sense and equitable fashion. One might argue that the Supreme Court was also acting in a partisan manner by rejecting the Republican legislature's district maps. However, when one compares the two maps, even a school child with a cursory knowledge of northeast Pennsylvania would quickly recognize the more logical of the two.

I do not pretend to believe that politics will not play a part in the Congressional restricting process. I also do not believe that Republicans have a monopoly on politicizing this process. For proof of this, one need only look to our bordering state of New York where a Democratically controlled legislature is doing its best to overturn a voter authorized non-partisan redistricting process in order to force through a redistricting map that will heavily favor Democrats in the Empire State. However, despite these facts, I believe that we can no longer afford to throw our hands up and surrender this process solely to partisan map manipulators.

I therefore urge this committee to redraw its northeast Pennsylvania Congressional district maps based upon common sense principals rather than partisan political prerogatives. I do this for two main reasons.

First, I believe that the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's entry into the redistricting process represented a dangerous usurpation of the power of the legislative branch of government by the judicial branch. Denying the court grounds upon which to do so again by adopting an objectively reasonable redistricting map would put an end to the court's meddling in such legislative matters.

Secondly, if a common sense redistricting plan, rather than a gerrymandered one, is adopted, northeast Pennsylvania will be less likely to have Congressional districts which strongly favor one party or the other and, in so doing, will provide centrist candidates with a greater opportunity to win Congressional seats. It is undeniable that our federal system of government has broken down due largely to the intensely partisan makeup of the U.S. Congress. It is also undeniable that part of the reason for this partisanship is the fact that for over 40 years, Congressional districts have been redrawn in order to pack each with members of one party or the other. The result are Congressmen and women who have no fear of being defeated in a general election and must instead solely appeal to the members of his or her own party to gain reelection.

Thank you again for allowing me to say these few words.