

Counterpoint: Judges should draw new N.C. districts

By Cecil Brockman | Posted: Saturday, February 27, 2016 12:00 am

“I’m making clear that our intent is to use the political data we have to our partisan advantage.”

This is a direct quote from state Rep. David Lewis, a co-chairman of the Joint Select Committee on Congressional Redistricting. Later, he said that preserving a 10-3 Republican advantage in North Carolina’s congressional delegation was a priority in the redistricting process.

When I heard these statements, I was stunned. Has the majority gotten so comfortable and complacent as to have no shame in admitting to stacking the electoral deck in its favor?

Of course, the justification is a refrain I have heard all too often in my time at the General Assembly: Your side did it first. This is a natural reaction, certainly, but a dangerous one. Citing petty grievances from the past is not only an immature way to govern but an irresponsible one. It puts personal grudges above the well-being and best interests of our state’s citizens.

Yet, during this redistricting process, all we have heard is that because of Democratic transgressions of old, the Republicans now get their turn to cut up the state to blatant political advantage. Politics as usual.

Indeed, as members of the General Assembly, we are elected to our positions as politicians, but we are also elected to be leaders and patriots. I find nothing patriotic about using whatever tactics necessary to rig the outcomes of elections. Each party should be able to win based on the merits of its policies and priorities. It is unfortunate that the current majority does not believe it can win elections on a level playing field.

Further, it is a betrayal of our fundamental democracy to create impenetrable super-majorities that render our elections superfluous. This only serves to discourage participation in the democratic process, a byproduct that is even more disastrous than a gerrymandered map. After all, what point is there for someone to run for office or even vote in these districts if the outcome has been predetermined?

That is why I am calling on the panel of federal judges to take control of this redistricting process. It is clear through their words and actions that the Republican majority in the General Assembly cannot be trusted with this responsibility. This approach will be much less partisan and once again level the playing field for our congressional elections. There is even precedent for this approach in Virginia, which will vote using judge-drawn maps this year.

We need to break the cycle of partisan gerrymandering and unfair elections once and for all. It is not too late to preserve a true democratic process; we just need leaders who

will commit to it.