

From the Virginia Redistricting Coalition
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Redistricting Coalition members charge Assembly to consider impartial student maps

Members of the non-partisan Virginia Redistricting Coalition called on the General Assembly and Gov. Bob McDonnell to seriously consider the House, Senate and Congressional district boundaries proposed by the student winners in the Virginia College and University Redistricting Competition.

"The maps these students have drawn show that it's possible to draw fair, common-sense political districts for Congress and the General Assembly," said John "Til" Hazel, Northern Virginia lawyer and developer: "That's the opposite of what the Virginia congressional delegation has done by so blatantly devising a gerrymandered redistricting plan that had one goal: protecting their seats. And it looks like the General Assembly is planning the same sort of "me first, voters second" scheme."

Hazel added, "Gov. McDonnell should be sure the final plans reflect the work of these students and the Bipartisan Advisory Commission that he created. I've watched and been involved in Virginia politics for years and it is time that we redistrict according to what's good for citizens, not sitting politicians."

Hazel can be reached at tilhazel@anglercompanies.com.

Winners were named Tuesday in the college redistricting competition, in which teams of students from 13 Virginia colleges produced maps of new districts for the House of Delegates, state Senate and Virginia's 11 seats in the U.S. Congress. One division of the competition specifically followed the criteria set out by Gov. McDonnell when he created the Independent Bipartisan Advisory Commission on Redistricting to make recommendations to the governor and the legislature.

The General Assembly will reconvene April 6 to approve new districts.

"Congressional districts and districts for the Virginia House and Senate should reflect regional and municipal boundaries voters already understand, rather than blend rural and urban or suburban voters into catch-all districts fashioned for somebody's political advantage," said Jim Babcock, banker and chairman of the board of The Future of Hampton Roads Inc. "It's good for business when representation in Congress and the General Assembly respects economic communities of interest like the ones that distinguish the high-rise offices of Northern Virginia from the ports of Hampton Roads or the Southwest coalfields from the farms of the Shenandoah Valley and Southside."

Babcock added, "Some of these student plans do just that, and the General Assembly should follow that lead, rather than just add or take away voters from existing districts in a way that dices up actual communities and business centers and robs voters of a meaningful choice on Election Day."

Babcock can be reached at Jim.babcock@cox.net.

"The winners in the college competition show that it's possible to draw new districts in a fair, impartial, sensible way," said Tori Williams, vice president of public policy and administration of the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce. "The General Assembly shouldn't waste this opportunity, which comes only every 10 years."

Williams added, "The Roanoke Regional Chamber believes that robust and substantive discussion is the backbone of sound public policy. Competitive electoral districts ensure that citizens can engage candidates in the marketplace of ideas. Reasonable steps should be taken to protect this fundamental tenet of our democratic system."

Williams can be reached at twilliams@roanokechamber.org.

As determined by nationally known experts Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute, the winning student team maps are viewable at <http://www.varedistrictingcompetition.org/results#TOC-Winners>.

The Virginia Redistricting Coalition is a statewide group business and civic leaders and organizations that advocate bipartisan redistricting reform.