

From the Virginia Redistricting Coalition

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GOP ambush in Senate shows need for Bipartisan Anti-Gerrymandering bill

RICHMOND, Jan. 22 – The non-partisan Virginia Redistricting Coalition condemned Senate Republicans' gerrymandering ambush and called on Gov. Bob McDonnell to veto the surprise redistricting bill if it comes to his desk.

The Coalition also called for passage of either of two proposals now before the General Assembly that would create an independent commission to redraw districts for the House of Delegates, state Senate and Virginia's seats in Congress after the 2020 Census.

"The Senate Republicans didn't just ambush the Democrats, they ambushed all Virginia voters, especially independent voters," said Lynn Gordon, president of the League of Women Voters of Virginia and co-chair of the Virginia Redistricting Coalition. "It demonstrates again why the politicians can't be trusted to design their own districts. This further tilts the districts to take choice away from voters – another case of elected officials picking their voters, instead of voters picking their elected officials."

Approved by the Senate on a 20-19 party line vote on Monday, the plan would create more districts weighted in favor of Republican candidates and affect districts across the state. Debate on the never-before-seen, 36-page amendment was limited to 30 minutes. The Virginia Senate is split 20-20 between Republicans and Democrats, but Democrat Henry Marsh was absent on Monday, attending the presidential inauguration. The innocuous bill to which the gerrymandering amendment was attached was held up for days until the GOP could take advantage of Marsh's absence.

"To say these changes are to conform to the Voting Rights Act is simply not true," said Coalition co-chair John Stone of The Future of Hampton Roads. "That's a cynical and pathetic attempt to cover up the fact that this is strictly a partisan power grab, and it is not in any way being done for the benefit of the people of Virginia. This kind of politics creates gridlock in the legislature and enables hyperpartisan fringe elements to displace independent-thinking voters in the electoral process."

The Virginia Redistricting Coalition is a non-partisan, statewide group of organizations and individuals who advocate bipartisan redistricting reform.

Coalition leadership comes from member organizations, including the League of Women Voters, AARP of Virginia, Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, Greater Norfolk Corporation, Virginia Business Council, Virginia League of Conservation Voters, Future of Hampton Roads, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Virginia 21, Virginia Organizing and Richmond First Club. Individually, citizens, business leaders, elected leaders and former state elected leaders joined the Coalition effort to obtain fair, nonpartisan redistricting that would contribute to improved representation and better government in Virginia.

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