

Editorial: Governor should veto lawmakers' partisan, divisive congressional map

Retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Edward Chavez and retired Court of Appeals Chief Judge Roderick Kennedy “enthusiastically” accepted the invitation to co-chair a redistricting task force “to bring justice, fairness and transparency” to the contentious decennial process.

And yet, the far-flung congressional map before Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham would carve the oil patch into three districts; split the population centers of Hobbs, Roswell and Albuquerque; and dilute the rural vote and shift even more political power to central New Mexico.

In addition, it wasn't even among the maps endorsed by the Citizen Redistricting Committee, created to follow through on the task force's work.

The time has come for the governor to honor the fact that her constituents should get to pick their representatives in government — rather than representatives in government picking their constituents. She should veto the map.

Chavez and Kennedy said in a Journal guest column in January that the 25-member Redistricting Task Force worked for 12 weeks studying state and federal requirements, best practices from other states and concerns from specific communities before developing 18 consensus recommendations — all in a report available at [NMFirst.org](https://www.nmfirst.org).

The 22-page report says the guiding values should entail keeping like-minded communities together, prioritizing communities of interest, protecting marginalized groups, avoiding court intervention, and not favoring anyone, specifically political parties or incumbents.

State lawmakers then created a seven-member Citizen Redistricting Committee, whose stated aim was to propose sets of maps honoring the redistricting principles. It's hard to square those principles with state lawmakers' approved congressional map, which would dramatically and unnecessarily reshape the state's political landscape.

The Citizen Redistricting Committee proposed three maps, and the Journal Editorial Board preferred the option that unified the Albuquerque metro area. We could live with the one that kept the status quo. The third, so-called “People’s Map,” was a gerrymandered abomination. The map on the governor’s desk takes that one even further and is even more painfully partisan.

It can be viewed

at https://www.nmlegis.gov/Redistricting2021/Maps_And_Data?ID202=221711.1

If approved, the northern-based 3rd Congressional District of incumbent Teresa Leger Fernandez, D-Santa Fe, would stretch from Farmington down to north Hobbs and also pick up most of Roswell. It would still lean heavily Democratic, but would bring in a large area of constituents at odds with Leger Fernandez’s platforms.

The central 1st Congressional District of incumbent Melanie Stansbury, D-Albuquerque, which contains most of metro Albuquerque, would shed much of the West Side, add Rio Rancho and run down to northwest Roswell to include a host of rural counties with very different constituent concerns from the urban core. It would also continue to lean Democratic.

And the southern New Mexico-based 2nd Congressional District of Yvette Herrell, R-Alamogordo, would recoup its population losses by picking up much of Albuquerque’s West Side, including parts of Taylor Ranch and Ventana Ranch, the Barelmas neighborhood and the South Valley. This would turn the traditionally Republican-leaning district into another one leaning Democrat, while carving up neighborhoods throughout the Albuquerque area. One example of the incongruity — the Rio Grande Zoo would shift to CD2, while Tingley Beach and the Albuquerque Country Club would remain in CD1.

So much for preserving communities of interest. Strike one.

Court battles over redistricting cost the state more than \$6 million in 2011 and \$3.7 million in 2001 in legal costs. House Republican leaders are already talking about challenging the map in court.

So much for avoiding court. Strike two.

Insiders say none of our three congresswomen likes the proposed map. Little wonder.

It shifts much of the metro area's population into southern CD2, which not only increases the chances of all three congressional seats being held by Democrats, but also being held by someone from Albuquerque or Santa Fe. That's unfair to residents outside the Santa Fe-Albuquerque corridor.

And it's unfair to members of our congressional delegation, who already cover large swathes of New Mexico. This map increases the geographic and political stretch each must cover.

The rural-urban divide has been an issue in New Mexico for decades. Southern New Mexico produces much of the state's revenue via oil and gas, yet its conservative voting base feels little love from Santa Fe. And this map takes a chainsaw to that base.

So much for not favoring a specific group or party. Strike three.

Lujan Grisham should not allow herself to be swayed by her party's antics — she should take this opportunity to be a true leader and represent the whole state when it comes to redistricting. Vetoing the congressional map and sending lawmakers back to the drawing board with instructions to honor the task force's principles will do just that.