



**Time to draw a map free of politics**  
**Daily Herald Editorial Board**

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After each new census once a decade, lawmakers are required to approve a new map that sets the boundaries of state House, Senate and congressional districts. Where those boundaries are set marks ground zero for political power for 10 years. And for at least since 1970, lawmakers have followed a process that allows them to manipulate the mapmaking for one political party's gain.

It's time we voters demand an end to that out-of-bounds boundary creation. Having put off earlier calls for change, lawmakers Wednesday held the first of four hearings on political mapmaking changes.

We're skeptical any process can truly produce a map free of manipulation, but we must demand something fairer than the current game.

Now, in a nutshell, the major political parties refuse to agree on a map and force a tie breaker. One party's name is drawn from a hat and that party gets its map, the one that gives them the advantages. The winning party does its best to protect its incumbents and create districts that give that party the best chance at winning, within the constraints of a federal law that requires, as much as possible, compact, contiguous and racially fair districting. The last map secured Democrats' hold on power.

This method also has tended to create very few truly competitive legislative contests. If Democrats win, they draw a map that packs an overwhelming majority of Democratic voters into as many districts as possible in areas where their Democratic incumbents reside. That allows Democratic leaders to focus on raising money for a few key close contests each election. Republicans try the same when they win the pick.

Months ago, the Illinois Reform Commission ranked a less-partisan mapmaking process a top priority to clean up state government. We agree.

Commissioners pointed to a plan proposed by people at Southern Illinois University's Paul Simon Public Policy Institute that would have the state supreme court's chief justice and one from the opposing party pick someone to oversee map drawing. It would separate House and Senate maps, which some believe would boost chances for diversity, debate and more competitive districts. This plan and others being pushed by some groups and legislators attempt to siphon politics out of map creation by giving it over more fully to computer modeling that does not consider citizens' voting history and incumbents' addresses. Legislators have to approve a new system by next May.

About three months ago, an overwhelming majority of the nearly 50 legislators who represent the Northwest and West suburbs said they favored a nonpartisan map process. We've heard little since. It's time they, especially the suburban Democrats in the majority, push their leaders to allow this key change. Map drawing is where it all begins. If our legislators truly are committed to cleansing Illinois of its gamy reputation, they will push for a new mapping process now.