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## Enough of crazily drawn districts; Work to reform redistricting system

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Editorial

Albert Einstein defined insanity this way: "Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

If Illinois residents expect to rescue their state from the ingrained culture of political corruption that made it a national laughingstock, they must reform the way that lawmakers are chosen.

The key to doing this, we believe, is to change the way that districts are redrawn for state representatives, state senators and U.S. representatives every 10 years.

If you want an example of insanity, look at the current Illinois congressional districts drawn in 2001. Mapmakers, driven by politics, not the best interests of the people, carved Whiteside County into three districts, the 14th, 16th and 17th - a fate also shared by Sterling and Rock Falls. In particular, the 17th Congressional District is an abomination - a wild C-shaped contraption that provides new meaning to the word "gerrymandering."

On the state representative map, Mount Morris was split between the 89th and 90th districts.

These oddly drawn districts confuse the public, dilute a community's strength in the halls of power, and diminish competition at the ballot box.

The time is fast approaching for another round of redistricting. After the U.S. Census is conducted on April 1, 2010, population figures will be made available to the Illinois General Assembly later in the year. If recent patterns persist, lawmakers won't agree on a map by June 30, 2011, and neither will a bipartisan commission of four Democrats and four Republicans.

How does the Illinois Constitution resolve this impasse? By the luck of the draw. The names of one Democrat and one Republican are put into a hat, a winner is drawn, and that party's map - drawn to favor its candidates - is adopted.

Democrats won the last draw in 2001. Their redrawn map led to Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, which was good for the party, we suppose, but not so good for the

people, given the state's current disastrous financial situation and the inability of elected officials to solve it.

How can the system be improved? A constitutional amendment would have to be approved by the Legislature and placed before voters in November 2010.

Are there any reform proposals out there?

Yes.

Some call for Illinois to adopt Iowa's nonpartisan redistricting system, where a computer redraws districts based on new population figures. State Rep. Jerry Mitchell, R-Sterling, favors this approach.

At Southern Illinois University, the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute has proposed two redistricting reform ideas. Both would use appointed commissions to remove politics from the process. If commissioners fail to agree, a redistricting czar would be appointed by two state supreme court justices, one from each party, to draw the map.

State Rep. Mike Fortner, R-West Chicago, proposes that citizens submit redistricting maps to the Legislature. Based on compactness, competitiveness, fairness, and respect for city and county boundaries, three maps would be named finalists, from which lawmakers would anoint a winner.

The Illinois Senate is studying ways to reform redistricting. A Senate Redistricting Committee already has held hearings in Chicago and Springfield to gather information and seek public comment.

A third hearing takes place Tuesday at Bradley University in Peoria. There, the committee, chaired by Sen. Kwame Raoul, D-Chicago, will address proposals for changing the redistricting process. The 3-hour hearing begins at noon in the Hartmann Center Theater, 1453 W. St. James St.

Since the fourth and final hearing will take place next month in Carbondale, the Peoria hearing is the best opportunity for Sauk Valley residents to weigh in on the topic at a public forum.

If residents don't want a repeat of the crazy districts drawn in 2001, they must work to change the system before the next 10-year redistricting window arrives.

Illinois can do better.

Illinois must do better.

It would be insane not to try.