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HOUSE REPUBLICANS PASS NEW CONGRESSIONAL MAPS OVER DEMOCRAT OBJECTIONS

Two days after unveiling the map that would outline congressional districts for a decade to come, House Republicans approved the plan Thursday with support from a handful of black Democrats.

Most members of the minority voted against the bill ([HB 319](#)), which cleared the chamber 56-36. Several Republicans also opposed the measure. ([Roll Call](#))

[Rep. Matt Huffman](#) (R-Lima), the bill's sponsor and chairman of the House State Government & Elections Committee, said redrawing Congressional districts after each decennial census count was one of the most important duties the state legislature performs.

Because of Ohio's relatively slow population growth compared to other parts of the country, two members of the state's congressional delegation had to be eliminated, he said. The proposed map places two Republican and two Democratic incumbents into the same district and pits one Republican against one Democrat in another district.



Rep. Huffman

Rep. Huffman said the caucus strictly followed the U.S. Constitution and federal court rulings in drafting the plan and cited a 1983 U.S. Supreme Court decision that requires absolute population equality in congressional districts. The map has a population deviation of only one person between districts.

While population equality was the primary objective in the process, he said Republicans were also cognizant of the federal Voting Rights Act and traditional redistricting principals that prioritize compact, contiguous districts, preserve political subdivisions, communities of interest and cores of previous districts, and protect incumbents.

"This first and foremost, complies with the constitution and the laws of the United States and complies with these principals," he said. "You can't just say the most important thing is competitiveness ... you have to take all of these factors into consideration."

Speedy adoption of the map is critical to avoid litigation that would ensue if the current Dec. 7 candidate filing deadline lapses before the new congressional districts are finalized, Rep. Huffman said. "Federal judges should not be drawing districts. That's what would happen if we delay the process."

The proposed map would place U.S. Reps. Dennis Kucinich (D-Cleveland) and Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo) into one long, narrow Lake Erie district and combine territory currently held by U.S. Reps. Steve Austria (R-Beavercreek) and Michael Turner (R-Dayton). In addition, [U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton](#) (D-Charlton) would be lumped into a Republican district with [U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci](#) (R-Alliance). (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, September 13, 2011](#))

Numerous Democrats spoke in opposition to the plan, warning that it would divide cohesive communities,

while piling disparate parts of the state into the same district to gerrymander GOP dominance for the next 10 years.

[Rep. Kathleen Clyde](#) (D-Kent) called the maps "a complete sham" that packs the state's Democrats into the fewest possible Congressional districts.

"In this politically 50-50 state, we are almost sure to have a 75-25% split in our congressional delegation for the next decade," she said. "The people are being railroaded."

[Rep. Matt Szollosi](#) (D-Oregon) said the map "only benefits Republicans" and predicted it would result in more partisan extremism and gridlock in Washington.

"This map goes beyond political advantage - its punitive," he said, blasting the division of Lucas County into three districts.

[Rep. Lynn Wachtmann](#) (R-Napoleon) said communities like Lucas County that will have multiple representatives could gain more power in Washington if residents were willing to work on both sides of the aisle. He said there were plenty of examples where constituents with more representation have gained more momentum to secure their interests.

[Rep. Matt Lundy](#) (D-Elyria) dismissed Republicans' insistence that there had been plenty of citizen feedback during multiple hearings around the state. He noted there were only two public hearings on the actual map earlier this week.

"To say that those public hearings have already been held is disingenuous at best," he said, noting the map had not been available until this week's hearings. "This map is proof of why we shouldn't have politicians drawing maps."

Republicans easily beat back Democrats' attempt to re-refer the bill back to committee and tabled a minority amendment that would have required public hearings on the proposed map.

Rep. Lou Blessing (R-Cincinnati) said Democrats abdicated their responsibility to participate in the process. Noting the minority caucus was allocated funding to produce maps, but never did so. "Where is your map?"

The minority party has traditionally offered alternative proposals, he said, suggesting Democrats were shrinking from potential criticism. "You have a duty to do it, not just us."

Rep. John Barnes (D-Cleveland), one of three black Democrats to vote for the new map, said it would ensure that the long tradition of African-Americans representing Cleveland in the U.S. House continued.

"In this bill, it preserves that district and that is very, very important to my community," he said.

[Rep. Sandra Williams](#) (D-Columbus), president of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus, told reporters that she was satisfied with the way Republicans drew the minority-majority district in Cleveland, which includes a narrow lobe extending south into Akron.

"We believe, based on the population shift, that that was one of a few ways that the district could be drawn" to maintain a majority of black voters, she said.

Rep. Williams also said the Black Caucus likes the new Columbus district, which is overwhelmingly Democratic, with a black voting-age population of about 27%. "We believe that is a seat that a minority could possibly pick up."

Nonetheless, Republicans could have done a better job of ensuring minority representation in the two districts, she said. "It's far past the time for there to be more than one minority (representative) in the

state of Ohio, especially based on population."

[Speaker Bill Batchelder](#) (R-Medina) told reporters after session that he was pleased to get support from black members of the House.

"We worked very hard this time to make sure that the federal Voting Rights Act was followed carefully," he said.

The speaker said he has been in close contact with Senate [President Tom Niehaus](#) (R-New Richmond) and doesn't foresee any particular difficulty in passing the map out of the upper chamber, which is expected to take up the plan next week.

"I think they have some unhappy senators, but we have some unhappy House members," he said. "You cannot draw a map that will charm everyone and I think this particular situation made it particularly difficult. When you lose two members of your House, that is tough."

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