

**From the Virginia Redistricting Coalition**  
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## **Redistricting Coalition members challenge incumbent-protection gerrymander**

On Monday, Politico reported that Virginia's delegation in the House of Representatives has agreed on a redistricting plan that would shuffle Democratic and Republican voters into new congressional district boundaries tailored to protect all 11 incumbents ("Virginia House delegation protects itself" [http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0311/51212\\_Page2.html](http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0311/51212_Page2.html)). Developed by political operatives close to House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, the plan uses past election patterns to reinforce Republican incumbents with more Republican voters and Democratic incumbents with more Democratic voters.

Members of the non-partisan Virginia Redistricting Coalition challenged and scorned the incumbent-protection deal and called on the General Assembly and Gov. Bob McDonnell to reject the secretive, self-serving gerrymandering and give serious consideration to the non-partisan district maps that will be presented by the Independent Bipartisan Commission on Redistricting and by the Virginia College and University Redistricting Competition.

"This is partisan gerrymandering at its worst. They've ignored voters' communities of interest to reinforce their own self-interests," said C. Douglas Smith, director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and chairman of the Virginia Redistricting Coalition. "Cooked up by campaign operatives, this plan tacks Republican-leaning precincts on to Republican incumbents and Democrat-leaning precincts on to Democratic incumbents. It adds voters in the Washington suburb of Warrenton to the 5<sup>th</sup> District, which is anchored on the North Carolina line. It pastes suburban Northern Virginia voters to the top of the 1<sup>st</sup> District, which covers rural counties all the way to Hampton Roads. And it splits the communities of Roanoke and Salem between the 6<sup>th</sup> District and the 9<sup>th</sup> District for the re-election convenience of two incumbents there."

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"They've got a lot of nerve. These seats in Congress don't belong to the incumbents, they belong to the people," said Richmond business leader and Coalition member E. Bryson Powell. "Voters should tell the General Assembly and Gov. McDonnell that they should do what's right for Virginia, not what's right for the incumbents. That means seriously considering the work of the Independent Bipartisan Advisory Commission and the Virginia College Redistricting Competition, both of which will come up with impartial redistricting plans."

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"Any congressman who agreed to this deal cares more about self-preservation than citizen representation," said Olga Hernandez, president of the League of Women Voters of Virginia, which is a member of the Coalition. "If this secret plan stands, they ought to call it that: The U.S. House of Self-Preservation. Instead of this gerrymandering, the General Assembly and Gov. McDonnell should pay attention to the non-partisan alternative plans being put on the table by the Independent Bipartisan Advisory Commission and the Virginia College Redistricting Competition."

Hernandez can be reached at 703-577-7061 or [LWV-VA@cox.net](mailto:LWV-VA@cox.net).

The work of the Independent Bipartisan Advisory Commission on Redistricting, which was created by Gov. McDonnell, will be presented before the Assembly reconvenes in early April to redraw Virginia's political map. More than 40 alternative redistricting maps produced by the student teams at 13 Virginia colleges are already on view at <https://districtbuilder.varedistrictingcompetition.org>.

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