

[REDACTED]

Date: 2025-07-26

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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Congressional

Message:

Remarks to Redistricting Committee

Just over three weeks ago, I stood in front of the Courthouse with other guardians of freedom, criminal defense lawyers, for our sixteenth annual reading of the Declaration of Independence. For the second year, I was joined by my ten year old son. This is a tradition that has spread to other counties, other states, and even other nations where Americans and other freedom loving people can be found. In the heat and humidity of a Houston summer, we read the great words that were penned in Philadelphia almost two and a half centuries ago. After reading Jefferson's timeless words, we also read the names of those who pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

I am amazed that after two centuries, it is not Jefferson, the most eloquent of the signers who still has the greatest influence on the operation of our government. Nor is it Franklin, the eldest, who said afterwards we have "a republic, if you can keep it." Nor was it Hancock, the man who signed it largest, so that "John Bull could read it without his spectacles." Not Caesar Rodney, who ignored his frail condition and rode horseback through the night to cast his vote for freedom. Not even the signer with what I consider the most unusual name, Button Gwinnett. I've never heard of another person with the first name of Elbridge. But the future governor of Massachusetts, the future fifth vice president of the United States, Elbridge Gerry is still remembered by legislators today. The district he drew, which was referred to at the time as "Gerry's Salamander" is still with us in spirit in the 21st century.

I lived in the 29th District when it was created in 1992. I told Clark Ervin when I met him that in order to be elected, he needed to recite the boundaries of the district, which at first glance resembled a dragon. He was unable to, and though he won the Republican nomination, he lost to Gene Green, who I legally voted for four times that year. Since then, congressional districts have gotten more and more complicated, stretching over more and more miles and counties. I have seen districts that were described as "made up of spaghetti farms" because they were too long and thin for anything else. I have seen districts that run from my home county of Harris to my late brother's home in Round Rock. I've yet to see a district as oddly drawn as my city council district, which in many areas consists of drainage ditches or railroad tracks skirting the edges of Houston from Clear Lake in the south to Montgomery County and Kingwood in the north.

Putting it simply, the abstract art done in the smoke filled rooms needs to stop.

If I am trying to explain to a boy scout at Winter Camp working on his "Citizenship in the Nation" Merit Badge that he can fulfill a requirement by writing a letter to his congressman,

I should be able to tell him “If your troop is in the Longhorn Council, your Congressman is _____. If your troop is in Three Rivers Council, your Congressman is _____,” without asking them if they live east or west of Highway 16.

When I lived in Channelview, there was a proposal to split my voting precinct into 5 different precincts – some of which would have only had the alligators sunning themselves on sand bars in the San Jacinto River as constituents. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed, and by squeaking my wheel, the precinct stayed intact.

For the most part, Communities should stay intact. Counties should stay intact. Neighborhoods should stay intact.

Tom Zakes

Houston, Texas

