

Redistricting will be rigged, activist claims

GOP will set boundaries to benefit itself, he says

By Joseph Deinlein
The Daily Item

LEWISBURG — Redistricting will be the next scandal in the Keystone State, political activist Gene Stilp said Thursday.

"The next four weeks will be a hurricane in Pennsylvania," he said.

Stilp, a former Democratic state House employee who is best known for using props — such as a giant inflatable pig — when advocating for good government in the commonwealth, spoke to a small gathering of the Central Susquehanna Citizens Coalition on Thursday.

"Remember, it's the old saying," he told the group. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease."

The coalition invited Stilp, who has filed numerous public advocacy lawsuits against state government, to talk about the ongoing redistricting process in Pennsylvania. Under state and federal law, congressional and state government districts are to be examined and redrawn after every 10-year census.

The Legislative Reapportionment Commission is working now to redraw those boundaries.

To sympathetic ears, Stilp said the Republican Party will essentially create a new map



Liz Rohde/The Daily Item

Activist and former political candidate Gene Stilp meets with members of the Central Susquehanna Citizens Coalition on Thursday.

that strengthens GOP-held districts and minimizes districts that traditionally support Democrats.

Although there are some general rules about how the districts should be drawn, districts in Pennsylvania have been historically gerrymandered to meet political needs, he said.

The rules are that each state House district should have about 60,000 people and have geographic continuity.

"Anyone who remembers the old 17th District that started in Dauphin and ran up to

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Williamsport knows that geographic continuity is subjective," Stilp said.

He also talked about how this redistricting would impact a proposal by Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi, R-9 of Chester, to change how Pennsylvania's votes in the Electoral College are distributed when selecting the president of the United States.

That proposal suggests giving most of the votes in the Elec-

toral College based on balloting in congressional districts. Currently, there are about 12 solidly Republican districts and six Democratic districts. The two remaining Electoral College votes would be given based on which candidate wins the state's popular vote.

But Stilp said it appears a number of people in Pileggi's party aren't buying into the idea.

"I think Pileggi doesn't know what kind of quicksand he's gotten himself into," Stilp said.

Once the spotlight is off of the Electoral College debate, it will return to redistricting, he said.

There are a few things Stilp said the coalition could do to ensure the voices of Democrats and independent voters aren't squashed.

That includes calling state senators and representatives and demanding to know what they know as to the redistricting situation. By law, a person running for office must be living in a district for at least one year before the election.

With no solid information on how the districts will be redrawn, a potential candidate could be disenfranchised because the new map could exclude them from what had been their district.

"Call your senator and representative," Stilp said. "Let them know you're paying attention."

The next step?

Keep an eye on how the districts are drawn, he said.

"Get ready to yell," he added. "There will be some unfairness somewhere."

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