

Public Submission to the West Virginia Legislature Joint Committee on Redistricting

Date Document Received: August 27, 2021

Description: 4 Pages

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From: Bill Bissett
Sent: Friday, August 27, 2021 7:09 AM
To: Joint Redistricting
Subject: Op Ed From Bissett For Submission To Redistricting Committee
Attachments: West Virginia should be split into north and south for U.S. House districts West Virginia Record.pdf

Good morning!

I spoke last night at the redistricting hearing in Huntington at the Cabell County Courthouse. Attached you'll find an opinion editorial that I would like to submit that was printed in *The Huntington Herald-Dispatch*, *The Charleston Gazette*, and *The West Virginia Record*.

Thank you for the opportunity,

Bill

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West Virginia should be split into north and south for U.S. House districts

THEIR VIEW

by Dr. Bill Bissett August 27, 2021



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TRENDING



HUNTINGTON – Anyone who cares about West Virginia should pay close attention to our upcoming congressional redistricting, where the Mountain State will go from three members in the U.S. House of Representatives to two.

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West Virginia should be split int

In addition to the dire concern regarding the reason for this reduction — the loss of population in my home state, which must continue to be addressed by all of us — the immediate question of how we will split West Virginia into two districts is a question that has been on my mind since this upcoming change was announced.

I've talked to numerous people about how West Virginia should be divided, from business owners to elected officials and political operatives of every stripe, and their consensus seems apparent to me: West Virginia needs to have a Northern Congressional District and a Southern Congressional District. Let me share two compelling reasons for this division.



Bissett

Charleston and Huntington need to be in the same district. For far too long, our state's two largest cities have been at odds for reasons that range from past conflicts to perceived insults. Since returning to my hometown five years ago to run the Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce, I have worked diligently, not only with our counterparts in Charleston, but also with any group or individual who believes these two population centers and the areas

around them need to work together and communicate whenever possible.

For a host of reasons, it is easy for this geographic partnership to fragment, but that's where ongoing communication and the building of relationships are so important. Lots of people live in one city or the surrounding area but work in the other each day, which is one of the reasons why Interstate 64 is such a busy road. If we make the mistake of separating these two cities into two districts, as we have done in the past, we add to the "us versus them" mentality that prevents both our cities from moving forward together.

Southern West Virginia deserves its own voice in Washington, D.C. Even though I was raised in Huntington, I love Southern West Virginia. Its winding roads, distinctive accents and steep terrain have always been a favorite place for me in work and travel. Yes, Southern West Virginia faces many challenges, which include many of the problems that affect much of West Virginia, but, in this case, to an often-greater degree.

and south for U.S. House district
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But the region also has tremendous potential, from a burgeoning tourism industry, producing rare earth minerals and mining metallurgical coal, which remains the only way to produce steel that we'll need if our country invests in future infrastructure like I hope it will.

For any of us who grew up here and have traveled statewide, we know one part of West Virginia tends to be different from others. These differences manifest in many ways, ranging from ethnicity to religion, topography and opportunity.

Simply put, if the decisions for the southern part of the state are made in Martinsburg or Wheeling, I see this region becoming a forgotten part of our great state, with no voice, less opportunity and increased hopelessness.

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I believe that this redistricting process, at the congressional level and with our Legislature, gives us a chance to address not only the future of West Virginia, but also how we collectively address challenges, such as a declining population, workforce participation and other issues that hurt our entire economy and everyone who lives here, whether your corner of our state is doing well or not.

While outside help is always welcome, I get the impression more every day that West Virginia will improve only if West Virginians work together. By drawing a congressional boundary that separates Charleston and Huntington, you'll succeed only in further dividing our two population centers and driving a stake into the heart of Southern West Virginia.

Bill Bissett, Ed.D., is the president and CEO of the Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce, which represents more than 560 businesses in Cabell and Wayne counties.



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