

# Stephen Henderson: Strange lines for voters



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Four days after the state House GOP unveiled an absurd and arbitrary proposed congressional reapportionment map, defenders of their hack [job](#) have flocked like fish flies to an argument that deserves knocking down: that the Voting Rights Act, which among other things preserves minority voting power, forced all this.

Michigan has [two seats](#) that are held by African Americans, the canard goes, and you can't legally get rid of one of them. With the population loss in Detroit, there was no choice but to carve up Oakland County to preserve the two black seats.

It's as scurrilous as it is flat-out wrong.

First, there are clear limits to the Voting Rights Act, including some that say if you contort and strain too much to create districts where minorities have a strong chance of winning, you're violating other constitutional provisions anyway.

There's a strong case to be made that the

House GOP's map, which splits communities all over Oakland County and lumps disparate stretches of metro Detroit into the same districts, invites that kind of rejection from the courts.

But beyond that, there's now a very practical answer to the blame-shifting on the Voting Rights Act.

This week, the Michigan Center for Election Law (led by unsuccessful Democratic secretary of state candidate Jocelyn Benson) named the winner of the Michigan Redistricting Competition, an effort to give ordinary citizens the knowledge and tools to draw their own congressional maps and have them judged according to the same criteria that the law sets out.

A young man named Nathan Inks, who also happens to be president of the College Republicans at Central Michigan University, won with a map that not only preserves two majority-minority seats, but also strengthens the GOP hold on our Washington delegation by forcing at least

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two Democrats into districts where they'd have little chance of winning. (You can see his map at [www.michiganredistricting.org](http://www.michiganredistricting.org).)

But it also makes many more districts competitive -- something that would better serve Michigan's large contingent of independent voters. And it preserves the **compact**, contiguous shapes that courts generally prefer.

Inks offered some commentary about the comparison between his map and the House GOP's, as well.

"Even I cringed because of how awkward and mangled it was," Inks said of the new district that would snake from the Grosse Pointes through Detroit and central Oakland County to Pontiac. "Such gerrymandering takes the focus off of the good things the GOP has done for the state and makes the party look like they need to 'cheat' to win."

Cheat to win.

Actually, I disagree with Inks about the new map just being good for the GOP. Because it so strengthens Republican districts with conservative voters, it also has the effect of making two Democratic districts far safer for their liberal incumbents.

It's a map incumbents in both parties can learn to love -- and one that voters, who'll be more likely to see extremists from both parties elected to Congress, will soon come to rue.

We can do better. A college kid showed us

how.

Now we just need the Legislature to pay attention.

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