

Representative Dellaney was kind enough to come to a recent meeting in Rock Hill where he described the redistricting process. He indicated that the primary "redistricting principles" were to consider "communities of interest"; compactness and contiguity; county lines; and applicable laws and standards. Let's consider each of those as it applies to York County and our future representation:

- There are few "communities of interest" at any level as clearly appropriate and important as the county level. It's the county that assesses, levies and collects most of our taxes, provides a major portion of our public services, controls much of our planning and zoning, provides a major part of our law enforcement service, funds much of our fire protection, and, in general, deals with our growth and well-being. What more important "community of interest" is there as relates to our representation at the State level?
- With regard to compactness and contiguity, the county is politically, economically, geographically and socially the most compact and contiguous unit.
- County lines are well defined and, in great part, are the dividing lines between the residents of the county and other counties not just geographically, but also as it relates to dealing with their everyday needs and concerns.
- Applicable laws and regulatory standards are what they are, and need to be taken into account.
- A fifth formal area of consideration which is clear to many, certainly including all of you, is "continuation of similar representation". That translates to the status quo being favored by legislators because it protects their incumbency, even if it means poor representation for the people. This is truly the fox minding the henhouse. To me, this consideration represents a glowing endorsement for the institution of an independent, non-partisan commission appointed by the Governor to study and recommend the structure of our districts including Senate, House, and Congressional. Such an approach would remove or at least have the potential to reduce the substantial and unjustified leverage that incumbency has today.

The characteristics not considered in this list are fairness and equitability. These say that persons should be represented by elected officials who live, work, and share primary interests and concerns with those who are represented.

Representatives and Senators come and go (some would say not often enough), but the county endures. The priority in considering how districts should be formed should be to insure the most appropriate and responsive representation of the people. This means that, wherever possible, the representation should come from and be resident within the most meaningful common denominator and community of interest which is clearly the county. What this means, in turn, is that, if combinations are needed, smaller counties should be combined in contiguous common districts representing the likely common communities of interest which exist in more sparsely populated and slower growing areas. Population location will dictate some overlap across the county lines of sparsely and densely populated counties, but this should be kept to a minimum in order to focus on commonality of district characteristics. Unnecessarily mixing the representation between sparsely populated, slower growing areas, and heavily populated, faster growing areas does a major disservice to both, since one or the other or both will be less well represented based on the residence of the representative.

We should put aside the almost total focus on preserving the status quo and the incumbency of the current representatives, and get back to representing the people rather than representing the representatives.

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