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On paper, and to those without any decision-making responsibilities, redrawing our state's Congressional districts looks like a relatively straightforward math problem: all that needs to be done is create a map of nine districts, each with 727,514 people.

Straightforward enough, right? But this time the process, which is actually quite complex and sensitive because of standards long established by the federal courts, was further complicated by the fact that Massachusetts' population did not grow as quickly as other parts of the nation. Consequently, we were forced to eliminate one of our 10 Congressional seats.

Suddenly, redistricting wasn't such a straightforward process anymore.

As Senate Chair of the Special Joint Committee on Redistricting, a job I also held in 2000, the last time Congressional districts were redrawn, I can say that my committee colleagues and I, knowing that going from 10 to nine was not going to be easy, or universally popular, were determined to have the most open, most transparent, most publicly accessible process in the Commonwealth's history.

Toward that end, we held an unprecedented 13 public hearings across the state, three in western Massachusetts, heard 31 hours of testimony from more than 400 groups and individuals, and utilized a website, which received more than 45,000 hits, to facilitate public participation.

Was it the most open, transparent redistricting process in the state's history? A lot of disparate people and organizations think it was, praising both the process and the outcome.

For example, The *Boston Herald*, in a November 9th news article by Chris Cassidy, said: "Astonished Bay State Republicans say they've emerged from the latest redistricting process with a better chance of breaking the Democrats' iron grip on the commonwealth's congressional delegation in 2012 — instead of being gerrymandered deeper into exile."

Even political pundits of all stripes also praised the process and the final map, signed by Governor Patrick on November 21st:

Nate Little, executive director of the Massachusetts Republican Party, said: “. . . Republicans are enthusiastic about the new lines. It’s obvious that more districts are competitive.”

And Mark G. Evans, a freelance writer and former professor at the University of Toronto, had this to say in a December 1st column published in the *MetroWest Daily News*: “This year, with Massachusetts having lost a Congressional seat, it was impossible to create districts that were substantially similar to those designed a decade ago. In the process, legislators and common people alike had the chance to argue for their preferred district boundaries. This year the committee did a good job of meeting the formal criteria. . . Gerrymandering is dead in Massachusetts.”

And referring to both the Congressional map and the state legislative maps, Yvonne Abraham, in a December 1st *Boston Globe* column, said: “The committee led by Representative Michael Moran, of Boston, and Senator Stanley Rosenberg of Amherst, put forth a gutsy plan. It reunited some towns that had been divided, upped the number of majority-minority legislative districts, and gave more clout to the southeastern part of the state. It’s a map even a Republican could love.”

What seems to rankle some residents of the Pioneer Valley is that Northampton and Amherst, communities that were at or near the geographic/power centers of their respective districts for the previous decade, have somehow been neutered because they now reside, together, at the western edge of a district, the 2nd Congressional District in this case, whose geographic heart is the city of Worcester.

I accept any criticism of this new configuration because, well, I knew it was coming - eliminating a Congressional seat was bound to make some people unhappy; there was no avoiding that – and because the majority of critics are people who only criticize, who never offered an alternative of their own. After all, one is easy, the other hard.

But what must be said about the final map, and the process itself, is this: Once the state’s population figures and trends were revealed, the viable, Constitutionally-defensible options for the Redistricting Committee were severely limited.

During the hours of testimony it became abundantly clear that Berkshire County should not be divided between two Congressional districts, a position I ultimately fought for. Furthermore, it became obvious that the further east the new districts moved, into Bristol and Middlesex counties, the weaker the western communities in such districts would become.

Also, simple math made the argument that western Massachusetts should have two districts centered in this area of the state untenable. According to the 2010 Census figures, Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire counties have a combined population of 824,161 or enough population for one congressional district. Combining that population with Worcester County produces a total population of 1,622,713 people, or enough population for two Congressional districts. Trying to squeeze three Congressional districts

west of Worcester County became unsustainable from the point of view of the redistricting committee members who represented every corner of the Commonwealth.

The compromise plan, the one now in place for the 2012 election, gives western Massachusetts the possibility of being represented by two senior members of Congress: Representative Richard Neal (D-Springfield) in the 1st Congressional District, and Representative James McGovern (D-Worcester) in the 2nd Congressional District. If these two are re-elected in November, and if the House of Representatives returns to Democratic Party control, then Neal and McGovern are both well positioned to become chairman of powerful committees, a scenario that can only be good for western Massachusetts residents.

Finally, the map my colleagues on the Redistricting Committee and I put forward is fair and Constitutionally defensible. I am proud of that fact. I am also proud that from the very beginning of this process the committee members asked the citizens of the Commonwealth to join us in a spirit of partnership. They did, and the final product was the result of an open and transparent process. In every way, this new Congressional map is the people's map.

And that is how it should be.

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