

Symbols of Ohio

The Bullfrog



The Spotted Salamander



The Gerrymander



On June 3, 2010, the Ohio General Assembly was able to come to a compromise and passed House Bill 393, which made the bullfrog the State Frog and the spotted salamander the State Amphibian. Unfortunately, our legislature left for summer recess without addressing the Gerrymander. The next redistricting takes place in 2011. Gerrymandering needs to be addressed this summer and put on the November ballot or we will have to wait another 10 years to reform the system.

Come back to the Statehouse It's time to address Gerrymandering!

Gerrymandering, or manipulating district lines, has been a problem for a long time. An 1812 political cartoon depicted a bizarrely-shaped district in Massachusetts. The painter Gilbert Stuart, famous for the portrait of George Washington found on the dollar bill, likened it to a salamander. The paper's editor Benjamin Russel suggested "Better say a Gerrymander" to highlight the chief architect of the unusually shaped district— Elbridge Gerry. The term gerrymander stuck. And manipulating lines for partisan advantage has continued in the United States and has flourished in Ohio.

"It wasn't fun drawing the districts and moving them through the courts, but it was all worth it when the results of the 1972 election were counted. We won the majority in the House 58-41, an increase of 13 seats for the Democrats. That's the power of the pencil."

- Vern Riffe, former Speaker of the Ohio House, *Whatever's Fair: The Political Autobiography of the Ohio House Speaker Vern Riffe*.

How do political parties manipulate districts or gerrymander? Whichever party controls the Ohio Reapportionment Board and the Ohio General Assembly, seeks to maximize the number of seats it can win. It does this by creating a large number of seats that are reasonably safe for the majority party and a smaller number of districts extremely safe for the minority party. The process results in most Ohio legislative districts being solidly held by one party and uncompetitive in the general election. This means that many voters do not have a meaningful choice at the polls.

The Ohio General Assembly has identified gerrymandering as a real problem. On September 23, 2009, the Ohio Senate passed a redistricting measure to address gerrymandering — Senate Joint Resolution 5 — and on May 27, 2010, the Ohio House passed their own resolution — House Joint Resolution 15.

Urge the legislature to come back to the Statehouse and work together on gerrymandering reform. Contact the Speaker of the Ohio House Armond Budish (614-466-5441 or district08@ohr.state.oh.us) and the President of the Ohio Senate Bill Harris (614-466-8086 or SD19@senate.oh.us) and let them know that we need them to get back to work.