

BUSINESS ADVOCATE



***Redrawing Michigan's
legislative districts***



SAGINAW COUNTY
CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

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LETTER from the President



Dear Members:

As we release this edition of the *Business Advocate*, we are still watching the actions (or inactions) of the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRDC).

The Congressional, State Senate and State House District Maps were completed and released in January of this year. The question is this: Why is the Commission still together, meeting and voting to give themselves a 7% raise, while facing a nearly \$1 million budget deficit? In addition, despite the deficit, the Commission voted to pay \$50,000 for a documentary about themselves and the process they used.

At a time of extreme inflation and increased energy costs, businesses and families are struggling. This action is unconscionable.

The IRDC was voted into Michigan's Constitution with the intent of taking corruption out of the process. The IRDC has gone beyond the pale in behaving exactly the opposite. Members were absent (the Chair of the Committee missed fully 40% of the meetings); many other Commission Members were late, left early or only participated virtually. All this for \$40,000 per year. And now, they voted to give themselves a raise to earn \$55,755.

As for the maps themselves, the Great Lakes Bay Region was carved up. Saginaw County will have three Michigan Senators and four Michigan House Members; all having a portion of Saginaw County. Many of those legislators will be coming from districts with little in common with Saginaw County. That means that we will have to fight for the attention of each to teach them about Saginaw County and ask them to advocate for our priorities.

We're prepared to do that and are already meeting with the prospective candidates, however, the process itself can be considered nothing but a mess. A message to voters is that there is no utopian way to take the politics out of politics.

I want to thank Sergio Martinez-Beltran from *Bridge Michigan* for his diligent attention to the Michigan Independent Redistricting Commission and the expertise he lent to this publication

Veronica L. Horn

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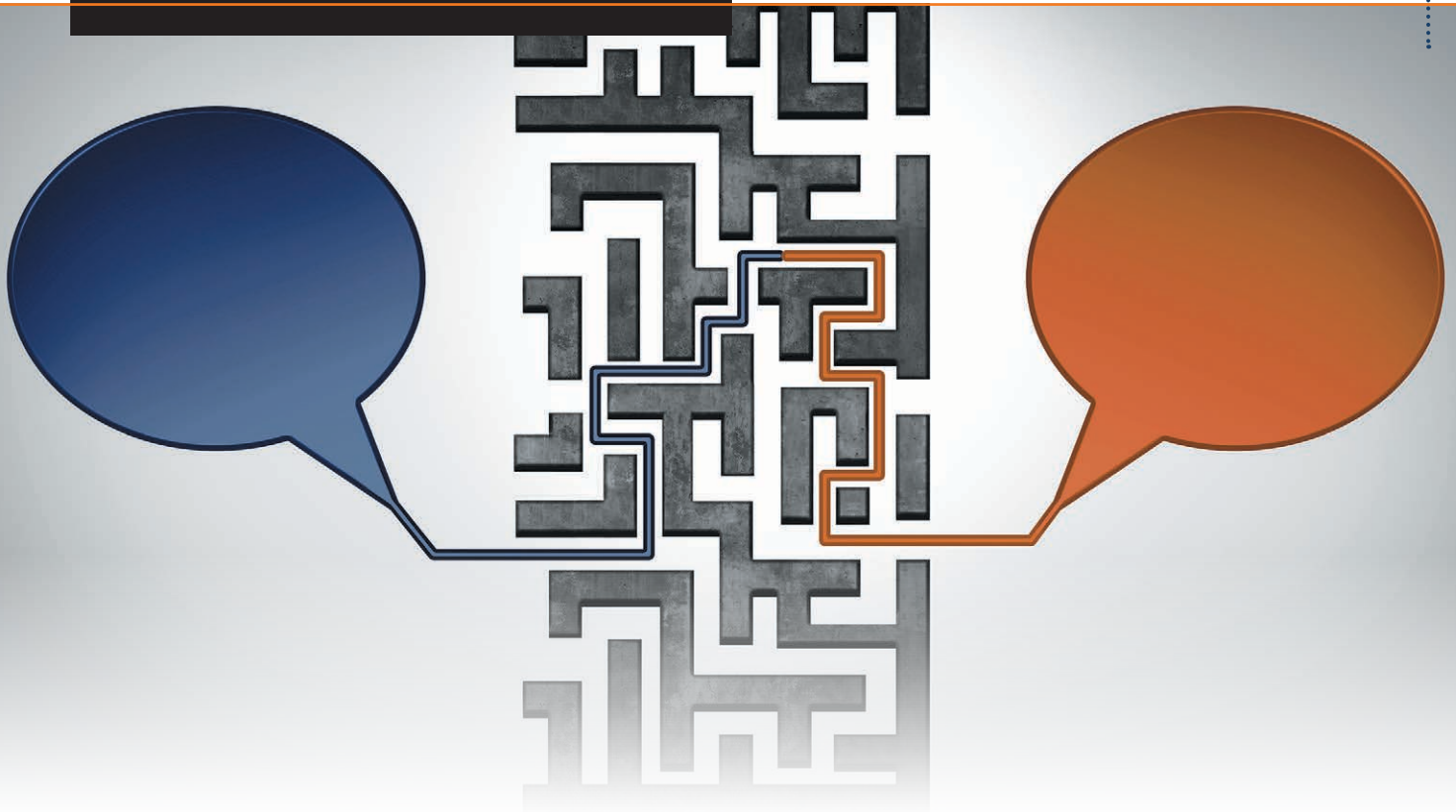
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MICHIGAN'S REDISTRICTING EXPERIMENT

Will Your Voice be Heard?



Michigan citizens sought a fair and transparent voting map when in 2018 they approved a constitutional amendment dictating independent panels draw legislative districts. But the degree to which newly created maps are fair and balanced may be in the eye of the beholder.

New maps put the political voice of Saginaw citizens, businesses and foundational organizations on the line in an era of unprecedented challenges.

“No matter what is thrown at us, the Saginaw County Chamber is on top of it and will get our members’ voices heard,” said Chamber President/CEO Veronica Horn.

The redistricting amendment shifted the once-in-a-decade responsibility from state legislators to citizens. U.S. Congressional, Michigan House and Senate political boundaries were redrawn and approved in 2021 by the 13-member Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC). Members consist of retirees, college students, a real estate broker, financier, entrepreneur and others. Four commission members are affiliated with the Republican party, four with the Democratic party and five are unaffiliated.

According to MICRC, the commission fielded 30,000 comments while developing the maps. But multiple lawsuits are disputing both the Commission’s process and product.

“You can’t take politics out of politics,” said conservative watchdog Tony Daunt of FAIR Maps Michigan.

Daunt joins other critics in objecting to the new district boundaries that fail to group communities with shared interests.

“They sold us saying that we’d have fairer maps,” said David Forsmark, owner and president of Winning Strategies, a political consulting firm. “They’ve divided counties, municipalities and school districts. Nothing is based on best practices.”

The State House map divides more than half of Michigan counties into multiple districts. MICRC defends the many splits maintaining that community interests do not solely depend on geography.

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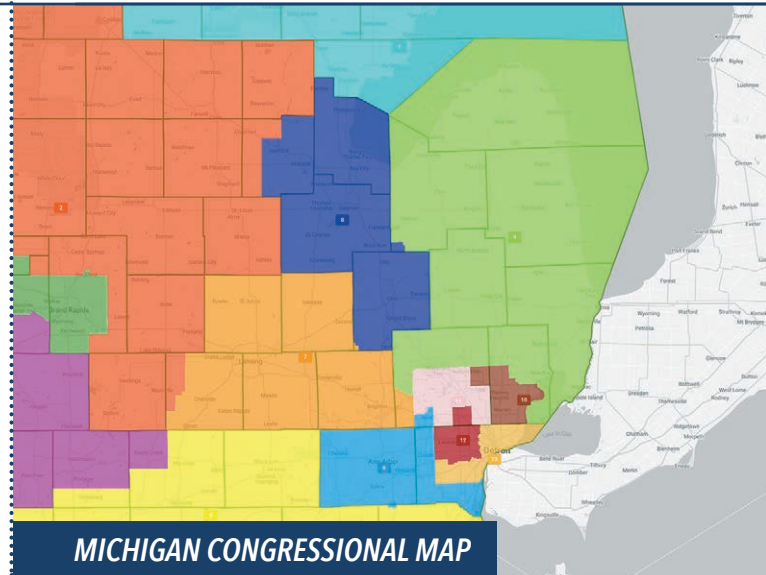
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MICHIGAN CONGRESSIONAL MAP

Great Lakes Bay Region Redistricting

In Saginaw County, redistricting increases Michigan House representation from three lawmakers to four. In the State Senate, representation increases from one to three.

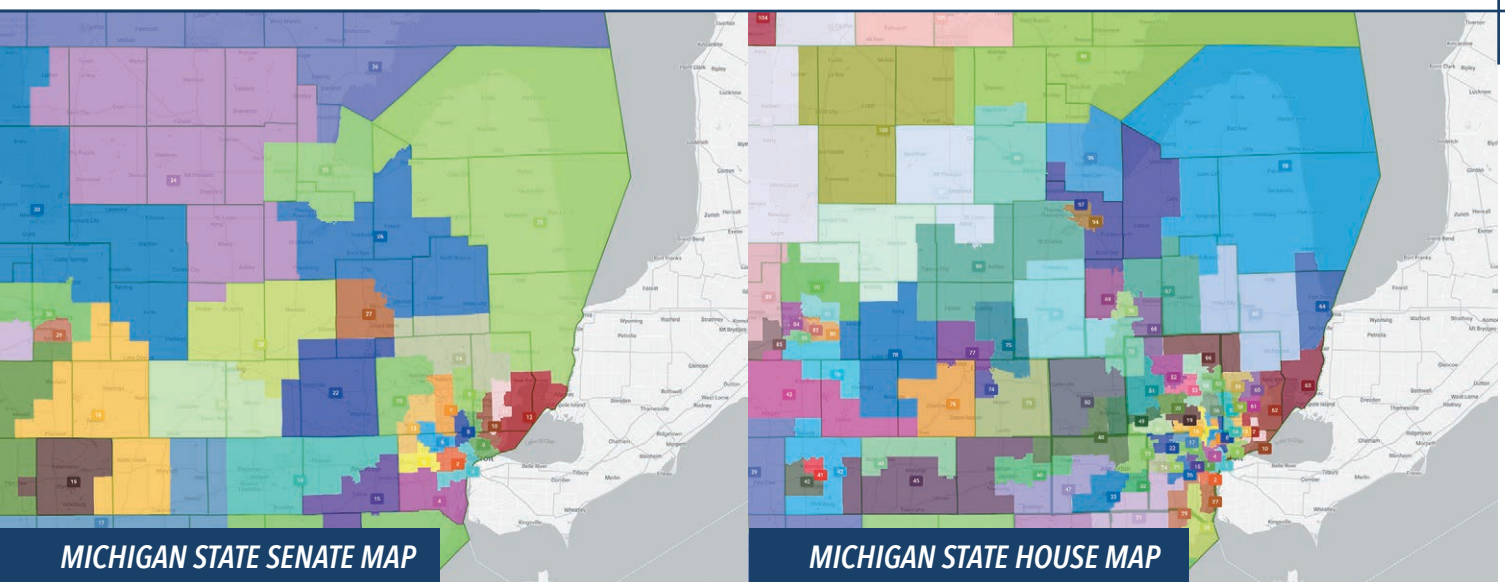
The 32nd State Senate District currently represented by Ken Horn (R-Frankenmuth) is redrawn to become the 26th District. The new 26th district embodies the Great Lakes Bay Region and parts of districts currently served by three State Senators.

Saginaw County's State House currently includes the 95th, 85th and 94th districts. The new 93rd district unites the western portion of the county to parts of Clinton, Ionia, Gratiot and Montcalm counties. The City of Saginaw and Saginaw Township make up the new 94th. The 97th joins eastern Saginaw County townships to Bay County. The 71st district aligns a slice of southwest Saginaw County to portions of Genesee County and Shiawassee County.

A nonpartisan analysis by the Princeton Gerrymandering Project gives the new district maps low grades due to "non-compact districts containing more splits than typical." House districts receive an F grade in geographic divisions. State Senate and Congressional districts receive C grades.

U.S. House representation shifts as well. Michigan's declining population, as measured by the 2020 census, resulted in the state losing one U.S. House seat, bringing the new total to 13. The newly drawn district is considered one of the most competitive in the 2022 mid-term election and critical to the U.S. House party balance.

MICRC shifted the current 3rd Congressional District, represented by Dan Kildee (D-Flint Township), into the new 8th District. The 8th embodies all of Saginaw and Genesee counties, the City of Bay City, most of Bay



County, the City of Midland and eastern two-thirds of Midland County.

Western Saginaw County, currently within the 4th Congressional District represented by John Moolenaar (R-Midland), is reconfigured to encompass Arenac and the totality of the Upper Peninsula. Moolenaar announced he will run in the newly created 2nd Congressional District, which embodies western Midland County north to Arcadia.

Incumbents losing name recognition due to redrawn boundaries can be expected to aggressively ramp up campaigning, knock on more doors, raise funds and work to gain the confidence of new constituents. For the Chamber, it means building some new political allies.

“It’s all hands on deck to meet with candidates and educate them on Saginaw and Saginaw County so that our needs are known, and they are willing to champion them in Lansing,” Horn said.

Contesting the Districts

While lawsuits were not uncommon in past redistricting efforts, the inaugural citizen commission has been challenged in court on the very basis of its mission – transparency and fairness.

Late last year, the *Bridge Michigan* nonprofit news organization, *Detroit*

News, *Detroit Free Press* and the Michigan Press Association filed suit against the commission asking the Michigan Supreme Court to require the panel to release memos from secret meetings.

Reporters being shut out of commission discussions raised a red flag. “We felt it needed to be made public,” said Sergio Martínez-Beltrán, state capitol reporter for *Bridge Michigan*.

The court ruled that the panel violated the State Constitution in meeting privately and ordered the memos released. Those memos pertained to discussions of the Voting Rights Act and the history of discrimination in Michigan and its consequences on voting.

In January, a lawsuit brought against the commission by the Detroit Caucus of the Michigan Legislature and others alleged the new districts violate the 1965 federal Voting Rights Act and result in disenfranchising Black voters. The Michigan Supreme Court dismissed the case saying plaintiffs did not prove federal protections were violated. A later filing requesting the court reconsider the original lawsuit was also dismissed.

Pending lawsuits could prompt eleventh hour court actions impacting the redistricting effort. New district maps must, by law, be implemented in March to allow candidates the ability to meet an April 19 primary filing deadline.

Unsettled lawsuits filed in the State Supreme Court against MICRC include a complaint by The League of Women Voters of Michigan and other voting rights advocates. The lawsuit alleges the commission failed in its duty to be fair. They claim the State House map gives unfair advantage to Republicans. It asserts Republicans could win the most House seats even if they receive the fewest votes.

A second unsettled case filed in federal court by Republican lawmakers and others challenges the Congressional map due to population differences. It claims unequal district populations fail to meet redistricting criteria and contends maps fragment communities without justification. The lawsuit requests maps be redrawn by a special panel.

According to the Princeton Gerrymandering Project, the Congressional and State House maps get an A grade for fairness and the State Senate receives a B grade.

New legislative district maps adopted and implemented will be in place for the next decade. Despite fairness disputes, how the new districts will impact elections is yet to be realized.

“The map gives Democrats a real chance to flip seats,” Martínez-Beltrán said. “But it may not happen right away.”



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Saginaw Chamber begins new 3-year strategic plan

On Thursday, March 17, the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors approved a new 3-year strategic plan for staff with an emphasis on growing and diversifying the membership, supporting and engaging existing members, adding to its robust advocacy program, and supporting a properly staffed and highly engaged Chamber team.

The key priorities of the plan support the new vision and mission of the Chamber:

VISION: Creating a thriving economy in Saginaw County and beyond

MISSION: We lead on behalf of business. We communicate, connect and influence.

In pursuit of its mission, the Chamber identified the following set of values which will guide future actions and programming.

Values

We demonstrate INTEGRITY – We do the right thing. We are honest. We make the tough decisions. We demonstrate the courage to live our values. We trust each other. We work for the community.

We live our COMMITMENT to the Chamber vision and mission. We do the hard work to communicate, connect and influence. We are conveners. We follow through and serve. We are proactive and responsive in serving our stakeholders. We are resourceful and empowered to act.

We are INCLUSIVE – We listen. We welcome. We invite. We reduce and eliminate barriers.

We are INNOVATIVE – We are forward thinking and embrace change to succeed at our vision and mission. We consistently strive to do what we do even better. We bring solutions and execute to access opportunity for our members and the communities we serve.

It is the sincere hope of the Board of Directors and staff of the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce to utilize our ability to communicate, connect, and influence on behalf of business to partner with stakeholders and other organizations that pursue the similar goal of an exceptional Saginaw County within an exceptional State of Michigan.



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