

Chris Ford: Wisconsin deserves fair redistricting, not ill-fitting models

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As I returned home after a busy ER shift today, I was met with a barrage of text messages. This is not uncommon, as I usually have abysmal reception in my hospital and place my phone in work mode to concentrate on the care of my patients. However most of the texts centering around a topic close to my heart: state redistricting.

You see, I had the privilege of serving as the chairman of the Peoples Maps Commission, a non-partisan body tasked with creating fair electoral maps for Wisconsin. Our mission was clear: to ensure that the voices of Wisconsinites were heard and that the process of redistricting was devoid of partisan manipulation. It was a task we took seriously, gathering input from thousands of citizens who cared deeply about their communities and their right to fair representation.

We weren't alone in our endeavor. We delved into the intricacies of redistricting, studying models from across the nation. We examined the Iowa model, often hailed as a paragon of nonpartisan redistricting. This model, with its emphasis on anti-partisan gerrymandering and collaboration between a commission and the Legislature, appeared promising. But we also recognized a crucial fact: what works for Iowa doesn't necessarily work for Wisconsin.

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Wisconsin is a diverse state, a tapestry of communities with unique interests and needs. Unlike Iowa, Wisconsin's demographic makeup is far from homogenous. We cherish our cultural communities of interest, and we must ensure that our electoral

maps reflect this diversity. The Iowa model, designed for a racially homogeneous state, lacks provisions to safeguard these communities. Ed Cook, legal counsel for the Iowa Legislative Services Agency-an agency paramount to the Iowa Model, has mentioned the limitations of this model outside of Iowa for this reason.

Recently, Representative Robin Vos, the majority leader, proposed adopting the “Iowa style nonpartisan redistricting” for Wisconsin. This abrupt about-face is perplexing, given his past dismissals of our commission’s work. It’s as though he’s suddenly seen the light. But let’s be clear: what Wisconsin needs are fair, nonpartisan maps, not ill-fitting models. More likely, Vos is pushing a model that doesn’t fit Wisconsin because he knows it can be contorted to fit his partisan goals. After all, his extremely gerrymandered legislature will be able to throw out whatever maps it creates.

Our current maps are a stain on democracy, earning an “F” in partisan fairness from the nonpartisan Princeton Gerrymandering Project. To trade one form of gerrymandering for another, simply because it’s wrapped in an Iowa-style package, is a disservice to our citizens. It smacks of political opportunism rather than sensible redistricting for Wisconsin.

Fairness should be our guiding principle. The residents of this great state deserve a system that truly represents their voices and communities, not one that perpetuates the same old political games. Representative Vos, it’s time to put aside partisan motivations and join the chorus for fair redistricting. Wisconsin deserves nothing less.

-Ford is a Milwaukee emergency room doctor and served as president of Gov. Tony Evers’ People’s Maps Commission