

GOP waffling on remap details raises suspicion among Demos

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INDIANAPOLIS — In criminal cases, courts demand *habeas corpus* — “produce the body.” In the current political showdown over legislative redistricting, House Democrats are telling Republicans, “produce the map.”

The GOP's response has shifted as the political deadlock has tightened.

Last Tuesday, it was: There is a map — three versions of it, actually — but you can't see it yet.

Last Wednesday: There is no map.

This morning: There is a map, but you can't see it yet.

Later this morning: There is no map.

Then, at midday today, House Elections Chairman Robert Behning said: Yes, there is a map, but you can't see it yet, and it might change anyway.

Apprehensive Democrats want to see the map or maps showing how majority Republicans would realign representative districts throughout the state.

Republicans say they want only to trim the House from 100 to 99 districts. But Democrats suspect the process will split populations of voters who favor Democrats, strengthening Republicans in the Marion County area in particular.

Today Republicans spotlighted how the Democrats have halted progress in the legislature by staging a walkout over the plan.

Last week, before Democrats announced the walkout, Behning said he would release rough-draft maps this week. But today, with Democrats absent from an Elections Committee meeting, Behning postponed the release at least until next week.

In another inconsistent move, Behning and Mannweiler said the effect of the redistricting might be the elimination of a district now represented by a Republican. Previously Mannweiler had said the redistricting would dissolve a Democrat's district, probably the 63rd District held by Rep. Donald Hume, D-Winslow, which encompasses Oakland City.

Parties in power typically use redistricting to

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strengthen their majority control, as Democrats tried to do with a 1991 redistricting. But Behning said dissolving a Republican-held seat was under serious consideration. Two Republicans from Central Indiana have offered to sacrifice their territories because they may not run for re-election, Behning and Mannweiler said.

Both those moves could serve to defuse the righteous indignation that Democrats espoused in press conferences around the state yesterday.

A spokesman for the Democrats said the Republicans keep changing their story.

“If you look at their story about why they're doing this, that changes on almost a daily basis,” said John Schorg, Democrat communications director. “Maybe there are maps, maybe there aren't, but if they're legitimate about advancing this proposal, they should advance the maps.”

Last Tuesday, when Mannweiler announced the plan, he said there were three versions of a possible new map under private consideration by the House leadership. Mannweiler described them as rough drafts.

On Wednesday, Behning said there were no maps in existence, only “partial” maps. His committee amended a bill to erase the present map but left blank how new districts would be aligned. Rep. Vaneta Becker, R-Evansville, said Mannweiler had shown her a “tiny map” that was difficult to read.

This morning, House GOP spokeswoman Kate Healey said there were three versions prepared, but Behning wanted to hold the initial versions to allow Democrats' input.

Less than an hour later, Behning told committee members, “We do not have a map prepared, and at this point in time we will be awaiting minority input before something like that has been developed.”

Later Behning told a reporter he meant that no map had been developed “to the point of being presented on the floor in a bill.”