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## Panel ponders complexities of redrawing election districts

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Written by **Gary McLendon**  
Staff writer

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[Gov. Andrew Cuomo](#) supports the end of gerrymandering. So do a majority of state Assembly members. But some say that if the current lack of political follow-through on promises to support redrawn legislative districts is any indication, change won't be coming any time soon.

Three bills to redistrict — one in the state Assembly and two in the Senate — are locked in their respective committees, in part because state legislators who in 2010 signed a pledge to create an independent redistricting [commission](#) may be backing away from those campaign promises.

But as panelists made clear Thursday night during a public forum at Monroe Community College, redrawing political district maps is a complicated issue that seeks to create more competitive and politically balanced legislative districts while maintaining voter rights protected under the [U.S. Constitution](#).

"Will we have more competitive races?" asked panelist Neal Jaschik, president of Citizens for a Better [New York](#), who said one of the ills of the current system is the long-term entrenchment of one political party in a district.

"While competitive districts are nice, it seems to me the more important thing is having them drawn in a way so that people who win elections in those districts are going to be responsive to their constituents ... that there is a chance if they don't pay attention to their constituents, they're going to get thrown out of office in the next election," he said.

Other panelists were Peter J. Galie, chairman of the political science department at Canisius College; Monroe County Legislator Vincent Esposito, D-Irondequoit; and Josh Jensen, representative of state Sen. Joseph Robach, R-Greece.

Esposito said he agrees the goal of more competitiveness is one to seek, but says redistricting alone can't make it a reality.

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"The process of partisan districting is really the epitome of self-interest in partisan politics, and it is an undercurrent of all things that we don't like about government," he said.

But redistricting "is not the end-all and be-all."

The Assembly bill (A-5388) seeks to establish an independent redistricting commission to create redistricting plans for congressional and state legislative districts based on the census. A companion bill (S-3419) is in committee in the Senate.

Jensen said Robach's bill (S-717) also is in committee. He said the bill calls for the majority and minority of each chamber to name one member each to a redistricting panel, equaling four. The fifth appointee would have to be jointly agreed upon.

Constitutional challenges abound in taking the process through the state Legislature versus seeking an amendment to the state constitution allowing for redistricting, Galie said:

"Why pass legislation that has constitutional flaws and then go back to square one?"

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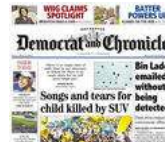
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