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The Rollercoaster Ride of Redistricting

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Old, rickety system

The rollercoaster ride of redistricting

At Kings Dominion they have rollercoaster rides called the Intimidator, the Dominator, the Grizzly and — my favorite — the Hurler. I think they should add one called the Redistricting Rollercoaster Ride, which would be equally as thrilling and nauseating. I hopped on this ride thinking I was to be a viable



Tom Shields

candidate in Senate District 8, a new district to include portions of Henrico and Chesterfield counties and part of the city of Richmond.

I turned out to be a theoretical candidate for a theoretical district, as Senate District 8 was eliminated from the redistricting bill. I walk away, as many of us do from these rides, with a spinning head and a stomach turned upside down.

I do know one thing about my short time on the Redistricting Rollercoaster Ride: our electoral system in the commonwealth is old and rickety and needs to be fixed.

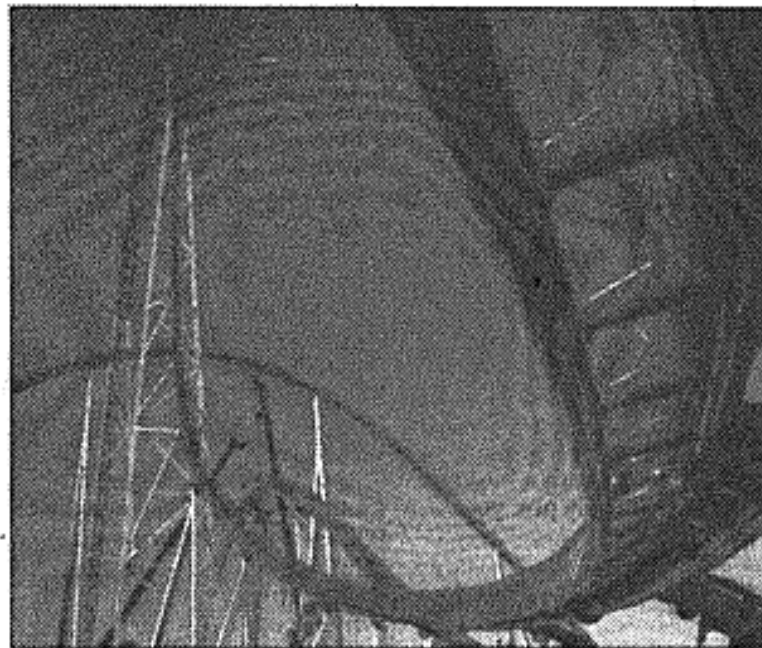
Everyone knows that redistricting is about politics and power — who controls it and

who wields it — but this seemed to be a ride veering out of control. I think State Sen. Ralph K. Smith, R-Botetourt, put it best when he said, "If you didn't bring your dog to the building, you're on your own." This quote reveals a great deal about a process where individual self-interest and survival were paramount.



There have been recent editorials in this paper and others discussing how the people were left out of the process. I've heard similar complaints and couldn't agree more. Was public input valued throughout the process? Were the people invited to participate in the high drama that left so many of our state legislators exhausted? Were the people part of the tense negotiations inside the Democratic and Republican caucuses? No, no, and no.

In fact, the ultimate irony was watching Gov. Bob McDonnell decry the Assembly's redistricting bill as too partisan while he turned his back on the recommendations of the Virginia Redistricting Coalition, the entity he created to represent the people's will and begin a nonpartisanship process.



KINGS DOMINION

Kings Dominion's Intimidator 305 roller coaster.

I think it is time that we the people wise up and realize that our electoral system for the General Assembly is broken.



As someone who has run for the General Assembly twice, in reality in 2009 and in theory in 2011, I believe that these four measures are absolutely neces-

sary to ensure more competitive and fairer elections:

(1) Our redistricting process is flawed. We need to create a true nonpartisan or bipartisan redistricting commission that carries the force of law behind its recommendations.

(2) Our campaign finance system is set up for incumbency protection and our state

has become known as the Wild, Wild West of campaign fundraising. We need to create a set of campaign finance laws that lessen the influence of special interest groups and even the playing field for challengers.

(3) Our state legislators have been in office too long. Many states have passed term limits for state representatives and it is about time that we do the same — four terms or eight years for the House of Delegates and two terms or eight years for the Senate.

(4) Our state legislators are out of touch with the people. Each legislator receives \$15,000 for a district office. All 140 of our state legislators should be required to account for that money with a district office to meet with constituents and hear their concerns.

As the oldest continuous legislature in the Western Hemisphere, Virginia can do better. Our electoral system should not be an old, rickety ride, but a beacon of democratic action and competition

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