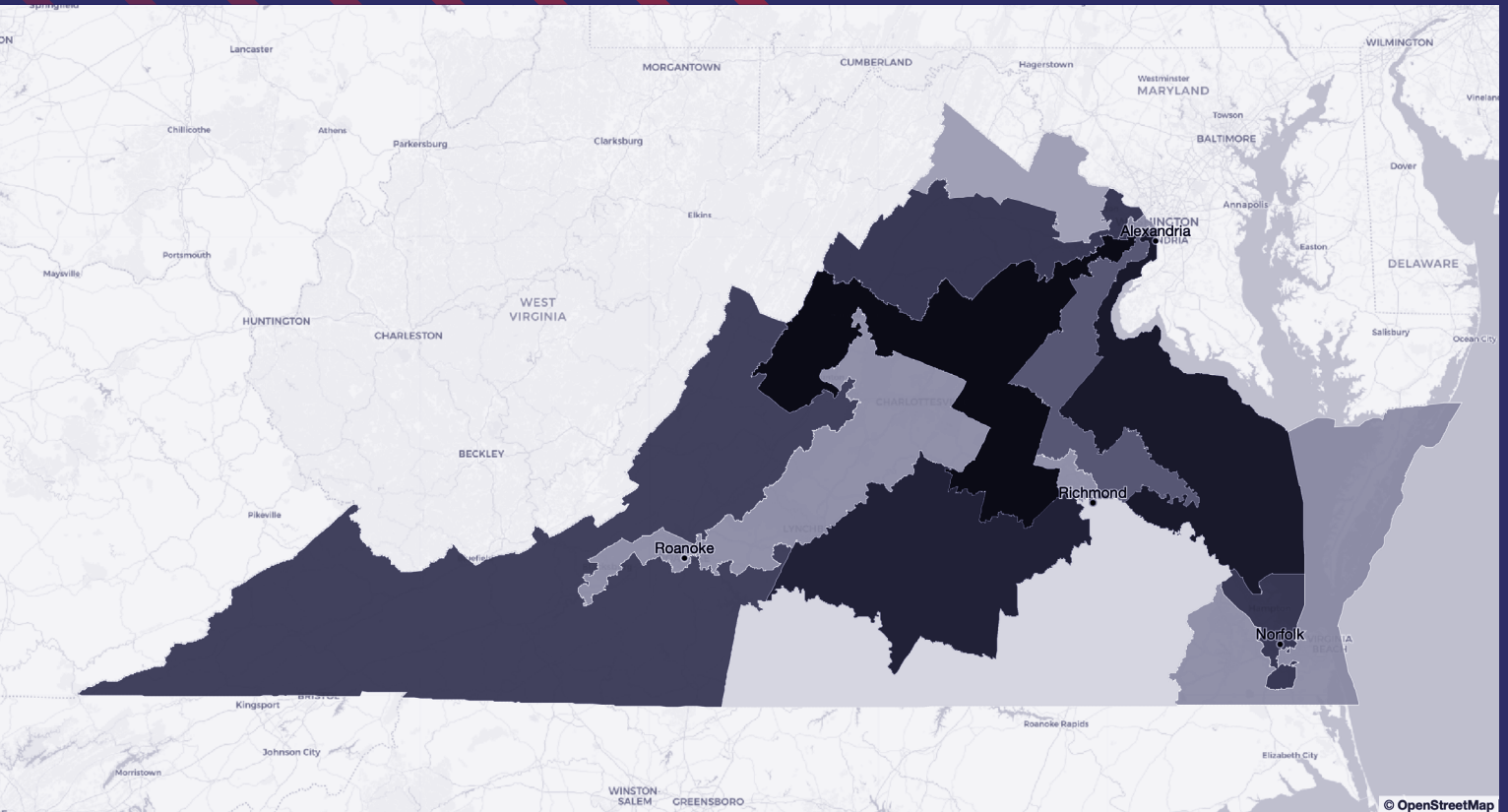


DRAWN OUT

Virginia's Mid-Decade Gerrymander Would Silence Rural Communities

A Policy Brief from Defend Forgotten America Action
March 2026 | Ahead of the April 21 Special Election



THE PROPOSED 2026 MAP: Five Northern Virginia tentacles carve through the Shenandoah Valley, splitting Augusta and Rockingham counties three ways. Rural communities would be absorbed into districts whose political centers are in the D.C. suburbs.

Executive Summary

The Virginia legislature asking voters to approve a constitutional amendment on April 21, 2026 that would gut the state's bipartisan redistricting commission, the very body Virginians voted overwhelmingly to create just six years ago, and hand urban elites the power to redraw the Congressional map.

The proposed map is not a partisan rebalancing. It is a structural demolition of rural representation. Five congressional districts would originate in Northern Virginia's Fairfax County and stretch their tentacles hundreds of miles south and west, through the Shenandoah Valley, the Blue Ridge, and deep into communities that have nothing in common with the D.C. suburbs except the misfortune of being attached to them on a map.

The Shenandoah Valley would be split into four or five separate districts. Augusta County and Rockingham County would each be carved into three. Communities that share an economy, a culture, and a crisis, rural healthcare collapse, broadband gaps, agricultural decline, would be scattered across districts whose dominant constituency is congressional staffers and tech-industry commuters.

This brief, produced by Defend Forgotten America Action, documents the threat to rural Virginia and calls on voters to reject this amendment on April 21.

Five rural counties would be split three ways

4-5 districts splitting Shenandoah Valley

Currently represented as one coherent region

52% oppose amendment

Roanoke College poll, Feb 2026

What is the April 21 Amendment?

Virginia voters will be asked on April 21, 2026, whether to approve a constitutional amendment allowing the General Assembly to temporarily redraw Virginia's eleven congressional districts outside the normal ten-year census cycle.

Virginia already has a bipartisan redistricting commission. In 2020, voters approved it by a landslide. The 2021 maps it produced, through a process that, for the first time in state history, prevented either party from drawing its own lines, are the maps currently in effect. This amendment would temporarily bypass that commission entirely, concentrating redistricting power in the legislative majority.

Early voting began March 3, 2026, even as the amendment remained tangled in legal challenges. A lower court in Tazewell County blocked it twice on procedural grounds, only for appeals courts to allow voting to continue. The Virginia Supreme Court has acknowledged "weighty assertions of invalidity" but deferred a final ruling until after the votes are counted. In other words: voters may cast ballots on a measure a court may ultimately void.

"It's court-shopping, plain and simple."

— Virginia House Speaker Don Scott (D) with other legislative leaders

THE BALLOT QUESTION:

What You're Actually Being Asked

"Should the Constitution of Virginia be amended to allow the General Assembly to temporarily adopt new congressional districts to restore fairness in the upcoming elections, while ensuring Virginia's standard redistricting process resumes for all future redistricting after the 2030 census?"

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE:

Urban elitists draw the maps. The bipartisan commission is sidelined. Rural Virginia gets split apart.

What the proposed map does to Rural Virginia

The proposed map was released by legislative leaders on February 5, 2026, with a last-minute tweak to the 2nd District on February 18. It was approved by the General Assembly along strict party lines and signed by Governor Spanberger pending the referendum result. Here is what it would do to rural Virginia.

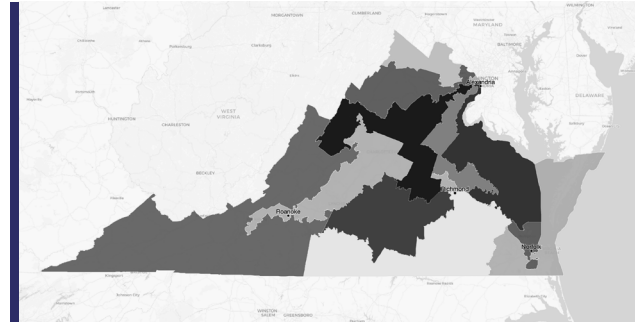
The Shenandoah Valley: Carved Into Pieces

The Shenandoah Valley is one of the most geographically and culturally coherent regions in Virginia, a farming corridor anchored by the I-81 highway, shared by communities dependent on agriculture, food processing, and regional healthcare. Under the proposed map, the Valley would be split into four to five congressional districts.

Rockingham County, home to Harrisonburg and the Valley's largest agricultural operations, would be divided among three districts. Augusta County, the economic heart of the central Valley, would also be split three ways. A proposed district would run from Northern Virginia all the way to the West Virginia border, connecting suburban Fairfax precincts to rural mountain communities with entirely different priorities.

The Fairfax Tentacle Problem

The structural mechanism of the proposed map is the division of Fairfax County, northern Virginia's dense suburban core, into five separate congressional districts that then extend southward into rural Virginia.



“Compare them to the previous maps — which represented communities of interest, and were contiguous, and fairly normal shaped. They represented west of the Blue Ridge, up and down the 81 corridor... we didn’t have these long tentacles that started in Northern Virginia and proceeded down through.”

— Delegate Chris Runion
(R-35), Augusta County, Virginia
Business, March 5, 2026

Fairfax County is the population engine that provides numerical cover for attaching distant rural communities to suburban districts.

The result: rural constituents in places like the Shenandoah Valley, the Piedmont, and Tidewater could end up represented by Democrats who reside in the Washington suburbs and whose electoral base has little connection to farm country, rural healthcare, or coal-impacted communities. As one rural delegate summarized it: the map pits “urban progressive” priorities against “rural conservative, rural agriculture and rural moderates.”

Southwest Virginia: The Forgotten Corner Gets Forgotten Again

The current 9th Congressional District, a sprawling but geographically coherent district encompassing Southwest Virginia’s coalfields, the New River Valley, and communities from Lee County to Wythe County, would be restructured in ways that further dilute the political cohesion of a region already in economic distress. Southwest Virginia has among the highest rates of opioid mortality, hospital closures, and population loss in the Commonwealth. What it needs is a unified legislative voice. The proposed map moves in the opposite direction.

Rural Healthcare is in crisis. This would make it worse.

Virginia’s rural communities are living inside a healthcare crisis. Twenty of Virginia’s 29 rural hospitals offer no maternity care. Clinics are closing across the Shenandoah Valley and Southside. Six rural hospitals face imminent closure risk. The life expectancy gap between Loudoun County and communities like Norton City exceeds 13 years.

This crisis is not politically neutral. When the Shenandoah Valley functioned as a single coherent congressional district, its representatives had every reason to fight for rural hospital preservation, maternity care funding, and rural health workforce investment. The proposed map would divide that same Valley into four or five districts, each anchored by a suburban or urban population center where these issues are not constituent priorities. Rockingham County, home to critical Valley healthcare infrastructure, would become just one

piece of three different congressional districts, diluted to single-digit percentages of each new district’s electorate. No representative whose political survival depends on Northern Virginia commuters will show up to fight for a birthing center in Harrisonburg. The map doesn’t just split counties. It splits the political will to keep rural hospitals open.

**The map doesn’t
just split counties.
It splits the political
will to keep rural
hospitals open.**

The process itself is the problem

Even Virginians who are skeptical of Republican redistricting efforts elsewhere should be alarmed by how this amendment was pursued.

FIVE PROCEDURAL RED FLAGS

- 1** Passed through a special session called for an unrelated budget dispute, not redistricting.
- 2** First passage occurred while over 1 million Virginians were already casting ballots in a general election.
- 3** Two separate courts have ruled the process unlawful. Voting is proceeding anyway.
- 4** The Virginia Supreme Court itself called the legal objections “weighty assertions of invalidity” but deferred ruling until after votes are counted.
- 5** The map was produced in weeks, in secret, by the legislative majority with no public input and no community testimony.

Virginia spent a decade building a redistricting process that citizens could trust. Six years ago, 66 percent of voters approved the bipartisan commission. This amendment, rushed through a legal gray zone and placed before voters who may be voting on a voided measure, undermines not just the map but the credibility of Virginia’s democratic institutions.

The map pits “urban progressive” priorities against “rural conservative, rural agriculture and rural moderates.”

The map was produced in weeks, in secret, by the legislative majority with no public input and no community testimony.

Our position

Defend Forgotten America Action opposes this effort in Virginia because it breaks rural communities, replaces partisan calculation for geographic coherence, and strips rural Virginians of representation.

1

Vote NO on April 21

Reject the amendment and preserve Virginia's bipartisan redistricting commission. The answer to gerrymandering elsewhere is not gerrymandering here.

2

Protect the Bipartisan Commission

The Virginia Redistricting Commission, created by voters in 2020, must remain the sole authority for drawing congressional maps until the 2031 cycle. No emergency bypass. No legislative workarounds.

3

Codify Rural Community-of-Interest Protections

Virginia law should explicitly require that redistricting maps keep rural economic regions—the Shenandoah Valley, Southwest Virginia's coalfields, Southside—intact as unified communities of interest, not scattered across suburban-anchored districts.

Virginia's rural communities, which are already underserved, already fighting for healthcare, broadband, and economic investment, cannot afford to trade their fragile political leverage for the chance to be absorbed into a suburban district whose representative has never set foot in their county.

The map is the message

When politicians draw a district that runs from the Fairfax suburbs to the West Virginia border, they are sending a message to the people at the far end of that line: you are an afterthought. Your county was attached to ours because the math required it. Your hospital, your farm, your broadband gap—those are not our problem.

That is the message of the proposed Virginia redistricting map. DFAA rejects it.

Rural Virginia deserves districts that make sense, not districts designed to deliver ten seats for Washington's political team. On April 21, vote no.

This amendment undermines not just the map but the credibility of Virginia's democratic institutions.

About Defend Forgotten America Action

Defend Forgotten America Action was founded by former America First Policy Institute spokesperson Jenn Pellegrino to advance conservative governance rooted in the Constitution. Our mission is to empower state and local leaders—the true engine of self-government—and ensure Washington elites can no longer ignore the voices of America's heartland. We support President Donald J. Trump's agenda of getting federal bureaucrats off the backs of farmers, manufacturers, rural and small urban healthcare providers, infrastructure builders, community banks, and energy producers, restoring jobs and opportunity to communities across the nation's heartland.

