

BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Monday, April 6, 2026

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HeraldCourier.com

RURAL VIRGINIA DIVIDED OVER DEMOCRATS' REDISTRICTING VOTE



JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kasey Griffin, right, and other members of the Madison County Republican Committee wave signs opposing the Virginia redistricting referendum at passing cars, during the early voting period on Friday in Madison, Va.

State could be next to redraw congressional map

OLIVIA DIAZ
Associated Press/Report for America

LOUISA, Va. — Michael Shull never imagined that a Democrat from the wealthy suburbs of Washington would represent his community in Congress. His corner of Virginia, with its sprawling farms and winding country roads, has been electing Republicans for more than three decades.

Then came an unusual nationwide redistricting battle, with Democrats and Republicans redrawing congressional lines to boost their chances in November's mid-term elections. Virginia could be next as voters consider a new map that would pair conservative rural areas with liberal suburbs, diluting Republicans' electoral clout.

"Politicians should be elected to be their people's voice," said Shull, a Republican member of Augusta County's board of supervisors. "Not their party's voice."

The vote on the constitutional amendment is on April 21, and early balloting has begun. If voters pass the referendum and it survives a court challenge, Shull's area within the county would be split between the 7th and 9th Congressional Districts. While the 9th District would be the state's lone Republican stronghold, the 7th District would resemble a lobster with the long tail beginning in Democrat-dominated Arlington and two claws reaching south into rural communities.

Congressional districts are usually redrawn once a decade, but President Donald Trump started a chain reaction last year by encouraging Texas Republicans to devise a new map to help the party in November. After a cascade of redistricting efforts, Republicans believe they can win a combined nine more U.S. House seats in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio, while Democrats think they can win a total

of six more seats in California and Utah. Virginia could give Democrats an extra four seats — enough to overturn the GOP's slim majority, at least as things stand now.

"It's about making sure that we fight back to what Trump's done," said U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va., He said the party needs to persuade voters that the referendum is "not about embracing gerrymandering."

"I feel optimistic, but it's close," he said.

A rural-urban divide

The referendum comes at a moment when Virginia Democrats have tried to make up ground in rural areas. Last year, Democrat Abigail Spanberger campaigned for governor in oyster towns and agrarian hamlets to engage with more conservative voters. Before that winning campaign, she had represented a congressional district

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Trump issues another stern warning to Iran

MATTHEW LEE, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN, SAM METZ AND SAMY MAGDY
Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday made expletive-filled threats against Iran and its infrastructure if it doesn't open the Strait of Hormuz by his Tuesday deadline, after American forces rescued a wounded aviator whose Iran-downed plane fell behind enemy lines.

A defiant Iran struck infrastructure targets in neighboring Gulf Arab countries and threatened to restrict another heavily used regional waterway, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off the Arabian Peninsula.

Trump on social media vowed to hit

Iran's power plants and bridges and said the country would be "living in Hell" if the Strait of Hormuz, crucial for global trade, isn't opened. He ended with "Praise be to Allah."

Trump has issued such deadlines before but extended them when mediators have claimed progress toward ending the war, which has killed thousands, shaken global markets and spiked fuel prices in just over five weeks.

"It seems Trump has become a phenomenon that neither Iranians nor Americans are able to fully analyze," Iranian Culture Minister Sayed Reza Salihi-Amiri told

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FRANCISCO SECO, ASSOCIATED PRESS

A woman holds a poster depicting the late Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, left, and the late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during a pro-government gathering Sunday in Tehran, Iran.