

# Editorial: Egolf's comments indicate his one-party ambitions

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BY ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD

Monday, November 16th, 2020 at 12:05am

Every now and then, a politician steps into it big time by being candid. Then, there often is an attempt to walk it back, perhaps apologizing if others somehow misunderstood the true intent of the original comments.

In the case of New Mexico House Speaker Brian Egolf, it appears he was simply being honest recently about his plans to redraw the 2nd Congressional District so that Republicans have little chance of winning it again. It was an unusual window into the speaker's political soul – a glimpse many New Mexicans found troubling.

While it's true the U.S. Constitution requires reapportionment and the redrawing of congressional boundaries every 10 years to keep them evenly populated, the timing of Egolf's remarks the day after Election Day couldn't have been more politically tone deaf.

Democrats retained super-majorities in both houses of the state Legislature, the New Mexico Court of Appeals and the state Supreme Court in last week's elections, and already occupied every statewide elected office and all five congressional seats.

Republicans hadn't won a statewide election since 2014. So Republican Yvette Herrell's nearly 20,000-vote victory over Democratic Rep. Xochitl Torres Small was the one big silver lining for New Mexico Republicans on election night – and Speaker Egolf just couldn't contain himself.

"So this is the last election for New Mexico's 2nd Congressional District with a map that looks like it looks now," Egolf told reporters in a post-election Zoom call. "So next time it'll be a different district and we'll have to see what that means for Republican chances to hold it."

Political translation: "We're going to gerrymander the heck out of it."

Two days later, the speaker from Santa Fe who is an architect of the state's progressive Democratic wing issued a statement asserting redistricting next year would be done in a fair, open and transparent process. "My comment on (Nov. 4)

about the 2nd Congressional District was a statement of fact in response to a direct question about the future of the district and nothing more,” he said.

Political translation: “Deal with it.”

But the damage was done. Even people who say they are registered Democrats have since offered denunciations of Egolf’s naked power grab.

“This is exactly the kind of shenanigans that turn people off to politics and make it hard for differing opinions to be heard,” wrote one SpeakUp writer. “There are plenty of conservative Republicans in our state and their voices deserve to be heard and listened to. How are we going to come together if we silence every opinion that differs from our own?”

“As a registered Democrat, I was appalled to hear of Speaker Egolf’s plans to redraw CD2 to make it more difficult for Republicans to hold the district,” wrote Thomas Hess of Albuquerque. “Democrats hold as core values protecting inclusivity and guarding against voter suppression. Redrawing CD2’s boundaries could potentially disenfranchise nearly 150,000 voters in southern New Mexico.”

“I am a long-time Democrat,” wrote Elmer Jackson of Albuquerque. “I was once a ward chairman. Even more I am an American and a man of faith. I am disheartened by Rep. Brian Egolf’s intention to redraw congressional districts to the advantage of my party.”

Steve Pearce, who represented CD2 for 14 years before becoming chair of the Republican Party of New Mexico, says Democrats already outnumber Republicans in the district, although the southern New Mexico seat has only been held by a Democrat for four years since it was created in the 1980s. “I thought it was very distasteful, I thought it was very unprofessional,” Pearce said of Egolf’s Nov. 4 remarks.

The election showed again that the 2nd Congressional District is the only competitive U.S. House district in the state, and the only likely seat from which a New Mexican Republican can serve in Congress. And that apparently just burns Speaker Egolf. He made one big mistake – he let his lust for one-party domination be widely known.

Or maybe we all just misunderstood him.

*This editorial first appeared in the Albuquerque Journal. It was written by members of the editorial board and is unsigned as it represents the opinion of the newspaper rather than the writers.*