

# Redistricting creating 'gridlock'

## Forum held at UNCW on gerrymandering and reform

By **Tim Buckland**  
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WILMINGTON — Voter apathy will continue if North Carolina maintains its reputation as among the most gerrymandered states in the country, an audience of about 300 heard at a forum on redistricting held Thursday night at the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

"There are a lot of Americans that are disillusioned" about the state of government and the way things work, said Tom

Ross, president of the Volcker Alliance, which "advances effective management of government to achieve results that matter to citizens," according to the organization's website.

The event was sponsored in part by the League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear, which supports redistricting reform, and Ross, who served as president of the University of North Carolina System from 2011-16, was the event's keynote speaker.

Ross said that, even with as noisy the 2016 election between now-President Donald Trump and Democratic rival Hillary Clinton was, roughly half of voters cast

a ballot.

Part of that apathy, he said, is disillusionment caused by gerrymandering, which he said has created gridlock and unwillingness to work in a bipartisan manner to solve problems.

"The way we're drawing districts now is not, in my view, helping our democracy," Ross said. "It's happening because the politicians in power get to pick their own voters instead of voters picking their representatives."

He said it results in a system of extreme politics where politicians cater only to their base.

"That's where they have to win. After the primary, they

don't have much incentive to pay attention to voters in the other party. They don't have incentive to pay attention to independents," Ross said.

"It creates a gridlock. It creates an unwillingness to solve problems," he said.

As Ross was speaking, the U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay of an order by the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals that ordered North Carolina legislators to redraw maps designed in 2016 that the court had determined were unconstitutionally drawn on a partisan basis. The appeals court had ordered the N.C. General Assembly to draw new maps by Jan. 24.

Ross said both major political parties have engaged in partisan gerrymandering.

"They are both guilty," he said.

Ross said a solution like a nonpartisan redistricting process hasn't been established because neither party, when in power, wants to do something that would result in a diminishing of power.

"When you're in control, you don't want to fix it. You only want to fix it when you're out of control," he said.

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