

[Opinion](#)

[Guest Voices](#)



U.S. Rep Emanuel Cleaver walks through the Missouri candidate filing process in February 2024. (Missouri Independent/Annelise Hanshaw)

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As the Show-Me State joins the mid-decade gerrymandering war following prodding by President Donald Trump, Republican leaders quickly framed the effort as a godly mission. Yet, their [proposed map](#) seeks to flip the seat of U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a longtime Democratic congressman who is also a United Methodist minister.

In announcing a special legislative session to redraw congressional lines, Gov. Mike Kehoe [insisted](#) the change would represent Missouri's "common sense values, rooted in faith, family, and freedom." Similarly, Senate President Pro Tem Cindy O'Laughlin claimed Kehoe "wants to be sure Missouri's representation matches Missouri's Christian conservative majority."

Somehow, the plan allegedly rooted in faith values to represent Christians means driving out of office one of only three ministers in the U.S. House of Representatives. As a Baptist minister in Missouri who would be thrown from the third district to the fifth district that is currently Cleaver's seat, I reject efforts to bless this profane partisan power grab as based on Christian values.

During the redistricting process over three years ago — at the constitutionally prescribed time — some conservative politicians and activists unsuccessfully targeted Cleaver's seat. Ultimately, state lawmakers approved a map keeping a 6-2 Republican advantage in Missouri's congressional delegation instead of carving up Kansas City to try for a 7-1 map now under consideration.

Of course, a 5-3 split would more closely match statewide elections. That divide still gives Republicans a bit more than the 2024 results when Trump defeated Kamala Harris 58%-40% and Kehoe beat Crystal Quade 59%-39%. So the current map is gerrymandered, just not as badly as Trump wants.

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Even if we accept O'Laughlin's claim of needing a map to represent "Missouri's Christian conservative majority," that would not justify a 7-1 map. Only 62% of Missourians [identify](#) as Christian — the same percentage as five seats out of eight. Even that gives her argument too much credit since not all of Missouri's Christians are conservatives, as Cleaver proves.

For those who desired a 7-1 split three years ago, the partisan goal of rigging the maps was often cast as a Christian mission. As I documented in my new book, *The Bible According to Christian Nationalists*, proponents of a 7-1 map in 2022 misused Scripture to justify trying to oust a Methodist politician. They twisted Bible verses out of context to depict themselves as divinely chosen heroes on a righteous crusade to save the nation.

Yet, as they gerrymandered the Bible to defend their partisanship, they overlooked basic moral teachings like treat others how you want them to treat you, do not steal, and love your neighbor as yourself. Kehoe and O'Laughlin make the same mistake now. They wish to claim the mantle of upholding Christian values, all while violating how Jesus clearly taught his followers to behave.

Although Kehoe and O'Laughlin spin their motives, Cleaver [noted](#) more honestly what this "unprecedented" attempt will do. Calling it a move to "silence voices," Cleaver insisted voters should pick their representatives, not the other way around. He added: "Our nation has endured wars, depressions, and great struggles for civil rights. And through it all, the principle that every vote counts has carried us forward. That principle is bigger than me, this seat, or any president looking to rig the rules for personal gain."

If Kehoe and O'Laughlin were honest, they would admit the inspiration for this partisan gerrymandering came not from Christian values but Trump. While they appear to hold enough political power to ram the new map through, they do not own the terms "faith" and "Christian." I will not sit by quietly as they seek to rig morality.

As the biblical prophet Isaiah [insisted](#), we must not call bitter "sweet" or call evil "good."