History of Calls to Divide New York

(The Speech given to the IRC on 2-8-2023 – which follows - are abstracted thoughts from this document)

The calls to split NYS are serious.

While others have not directly tied the calls to secede from New York State to the 1964 United States Supreme Court ruling, there is no denying that the increased number of calls to secede are related to the loss of regional representation in the NYS legislature, specifically the loss of county representation.

The calls to divide NY are increasing, and becoming more serious, stronger, and more bizarre. All these efforts attempt to restore some semblance of regional input into NYS’s Legislature. One proposal is to insert another layer of government between the counties and the state Legislature. It is basically a proposal to decimate the current State Government structure.

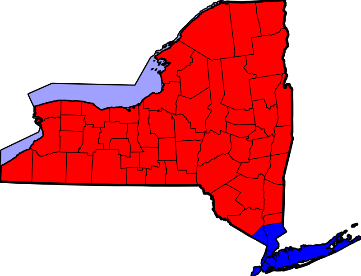
This is a serious situation. If it is not addressed directly by this committee, I believe the movements will gain strength quickly and NYS will change – drastically – and probably not for the better.

Here is a brief history of the calls to secede.

The first call for secession was in 1777 when Vermont seceded. It was granted statehood in 1778.

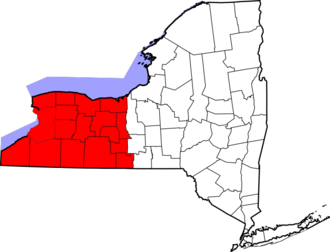
The next call for a county to secede was nearly a hundred years later, in 1861 when it was proposed New York City become a sovereign city-state. The Free City of Tri-Insula (3-islands). Its motivation - it wanted to continue trade with the south, even though the civil war broke out.

There was not another call for secession for 108 years -1969 - four years after the USSC ruling[[1]](#endnote-1). The proposal was to make New York City the 51st state.

 From that point on the calls to divide NYS have increased. A good review of the history of this movement can be found in Wikipedia[[2]](#endnote-2). The reference will be provided in my written submission. Here are a few excerpts from Wikipedia of these movements

In 1989, a bill was introduced into the NYS Senate proposing to split New York into two states[[3]](#endnote-3).

This bill was introduced several times over the next 9 years.



In 1999, a senator called for NYS to be divided into two states, but this time to split the state at Hammondsport, Steuben County, with the counties to the south retaining the name “State of New York”, and the remainder to be named “State of West New York”. This is the proposed division[[4]](#endnote-4).

In 2003, a bill was introduced into Queens County Council calling for secession from NYS, and about 40% of the city’s council members supported the call.

In 2004, the bill was reintroduced again in Queens County, this time with an additional sponsor. **3 min**

In 2008, a bill was introduced into the New York City legislature proposing NYC secede from NYS.

In 2009, State Senators Joseph Robach, Dale Volker, and Michael Ranzenhofer, Western New York Republicans, proposed a nonbinding referendum to gauge support for the concept of dividing the state.

In 2010, a former Suffolk County Comptroller and the Nassau County Executive called for Nassau and Suffolk counties to secede from NYS.

In 2010, a separate movement pushed for secession of the entire geographic island (Kings, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk).

Also, In 2010, another parallel movement called for dividing New York State in half, with Albany, the Hudson River Valley, and NYC in one portion, and the rest of NYS in the other.

In 2011, there was a movement for Western New York to secede and become the State of Niagara.

In 2012 and again in 2013, a Republican Assemblyman from the 139th Assembly District again introduced a bill to have a referendum so residents in every county could provide feedback on their interest in dividing the state.

In 2015, fifteen towns in Sullivan, Delaware, Broome, and Tioga counties looked into seceding from NYS to join Pennsylvania.

Alao in 2015, state legislators from Long Island and upstate New York again introduced legislation so they could gauge how much support existed for splitting the state.

In 2019, a New York City councilman announced plans to introduce a set of bills to study the feasibility of New York City seceding - and an Assemblyman from Staten Island, expressed interest in joining upstate if NYC seceded.

In 2020, the Assemblyman from the 139th District pushed for a Divide New York referendum, but with calls for the Divide New York movement appearing to not be growing, he joined a movement to split NYS into 3 autonomous regions, and make the governor a ‘token’ governor[[5]](#endnote-5), with each region being autonomous.

This three-autonomous-region plan, as a solution to the lack of regional input into the legislature, would decimate the NYS Senate, and would establish a completely different numerical average population density for each region.[[6]](#endnote-6) This plan even had corollary bills introduced into the NYS Senate and Assembly[[7]](#endnote-7),[[8]](#endnote-8) to create the three 3 autonomous regions and appears to have some grassroots support[[9]](#endnote-9).

The divide NYS movement is growing. If regional representation is not restored to the Assembly, I fear the fate of New York state will not be pleasant, because if your Assembly District plan is adopted, it will be like a shot of adrenaline, that makes these movements blossom. One organization is already growing in the wake of your first public hearing - the organization referred to as Western New York State. Its goal is to fill the gap that now exists in the NYS government, and its ultimate goal is to secede and create a new “Western New York State”. Creating a NY City-state will instantly become a corollary movement. Leaving the remnants of New York state to fend for themselves.

A plethora of documents can be found online concerning the current efforts to solve the problems created by the 1964 USSC decree. Everything from restructuring the NYS Government by the division of NYS into autonomous regions, to the formal creation of separate states, to counties splitting off on their own as a separate state, to eliminating the Assembly or the Senate.

There are some counter anti-divide sentiments[[10]](#endnote-10), but those opposing the Divide New York movement have not been offering solutions to what I believe is at the heart of all the dissension – the loss of county representation in the state government. One of their suggestions is the following: Eliminate the NYS Assembly completely[[11]](#endnote-11). This proposal would reverse the roles of the Assembly and Senate, thus restoring regional representation to the NYS Legislature, because it proposed one, and just one, NYS Senator be assigned to each County.

What is obvious from these movements is that regardless of whether you focus on the most populated counties, or the least populated counties, the loss of county representation in the NYS Legislature has made the NYS government unresponsive to regional concerns.

We don’t need two legislative bodies to represent the people. I ask that you abandon the Assembly maps you have been considering and restore the republican structure to our state government. Just assign the Assembly seats to the counties and let the counties decide whether they want separate districts for each, or have their Assembly representatives share overlapping county wide districts.

1. ) https://supreme.justica.com/cases/federal/us/377/533/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. ) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition\_and\_secession\_in\_New\_York [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. ) By Crazytonyi - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40408734 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. ) By Pcarosa - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=44337597 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ) https://www.niagara-gazette.com/news/local\_news/divide-nys-brings-two-bills-before-legislature/article\_dab159e7-ff88-57a1-a032-a481e76d6ae5.html [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. ) https://www.divideny.org/ [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. ) https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2019/s5416 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. ) https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2019/a5498) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. ) One organization, the Divide New York State Caucus, Inc., has drafted a proposal to partition the State into three autonomous regions: The “New Amsterdam” Region (Upstate), the “New York” Region (the City), and a third region of “Montauk” (comprising Long Island, and Rockland and Westchester Counties). These autonomous regions would, according to the plan, work in tandem with a token state government to comply with the U.S. Constitution. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. ) https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/albany/2019/10/15/divide-new-york-into-two-states-people-have-strong-opinion/3984202002/ [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. ) <https://www.oleantimesherald.com/news/upstate-senator-renews-push-for-one-senator-per-ny-county/article>

    Verbal Presentation to the IRC on 2-8-2023

    Concerns History of Calls to Divide New York

    Good evening Commissioners, Fellow New Yorkers

    You may be aware of the Divide New York State movements. Their existence is a direct consequence of the loss of county representation in the NYS Legislature. If regional representation is not restored by this committee, I believe these movements will gain strength quickly.

    Here is a brief overview of the divide New York movements.

    Vermont seceded in 1777, even before New York State became a state.

    Nearly a hundred years later, in 1861, the US Civil war broke out. New York City wanted to continue to trade with the south, so it proposed becoming a sovereign city-state.

    The next call for secession was 108 years later – just 4 years after the 1964 US Supreme Court ruling. The movement was once again, to make New York City the 51st state.

    From that point on, the calls to divide NYS have been increasing in variety, number, and seriousness.

    In 1989, and several times over the next ten (10) years, proposals were made to split New York State into two states.

    In 1999, a NY State Senator called for NYS to be divided into two states, but this time the split proposed was at Steuben County.

    In 2003 and 2004, a Queens County Councilman introduced a bill calling for Queens to secede from NYS.

    Then, again in 2008, 2010, and 2019, proposals to secede were introduced in New York City Council. The 2019 proposal was serious enough that an Assemblyman from Staten Island felt it necessary to express interest in joining upstate if NY City seceded.

    In 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2020, State Senators and Assemblymen proposed nonbinding referendums just to gauge support for the concept of dividing New York State.

    In 2011, there was a movement for Western New York to secede and become the State of Niagara.

    In 2015, fifteen (15) towns in Sullivan, Delaware, Broome, and Tioga counties looked into seceding from NYS - to join Pennsylvania.

    In 2020, a movement gained support to split NYS into 3 autonomous regions, making the governor a ‘token’ governor. Corollary bills were even introduced into both the NYS Senate and Assembly.

    If adopted, your current Assembly District plans will act like a shot of adrenaline that will make these “Divide New York State” movements blossom. I ask that you abandon the Assembly maps you have been considering. Restore the republican structure to our state government. Assign the Assembly seats to the counties. It should be up to the counties to decide whether they want separate districts for each Assembly representative or have their Assembly representatives share overlapping county wide districts. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)