

Civil War II: Gun control could push Virginia counties to join West Virginia

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West Virginia lawmakers are scrambling to let rural Virginia counties join the Mountain State amid conservative voter anger with the new Democratic majority in Richmond and its push for gun control and other liberal initiatives.

In a building fight that echoes the Civil War-era split of the Old Dominion that created West Virginia in 1863, 40 of 100 West Virginia House delegates have signed on to legislation that would accept revolting Virginia counties and towns.

The effort began after the November elections when urban and suburban voters put the Virginia General Assembly into Democratic hands. Many of those Democrats ran on a platform of restricting and banning guns.

“We’re starting to get some phone calls from friends on the border who say these folks want to leave,” said [West Virginia Del. Gary Howell](#).

Howell, a Republican, told Secrets that what started off as a long-shot effort “has turned into a real thing.”

He said that Virginia lawmakers and officials along the West Virginia border have cited the Democratic drive for gun control and desire to shift spending to the urban areas near Washington as reasons to leave for West Virginia.

In his bill, [HCR 8](#), Howell and his team wrote about the urban-rural battle: “These tensions have been compounded by a perception of contempt on the part of the government at Richmond for the differences in certain fundamental political and societal principles which prevail between the varied counties and cities of that Commonwealth.”

He also cited gun control, a huge fight on display in Richmond Monday when some 22,000 gun owners protested restrictions sweeping through the state Senate. There is no new push for gun control in West Virginia.

“In the latest, and most evident, in this string of grievances, the government at Richmond now seeks to place intolerable restraints upon the rights guaranteed under the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution to the citizens of that Commonwealth,” said the Howell legislation, now before the rules committee. Howell is on the rules committee and is also the chairman of the Government Organization Committee.

The bottom line in the legislation: “In a spirit of conciliation, the legislature of West Virginia hereby extends an invitation to our fellow Virginians who wish to do so, to join us in our noble experiment of 156 years of separation from the government at Richmond;

and, we extend an invitation to any constituent county or city of the Commonwealth of Virginia to be admitted to the body politic of the state of West Virginia.”

One county that could lead the way with or without the legislation is Frederick, some 70 miles from Washington. It still has an open invitation from the 1800s to join West Virginia, and some members of the county board of supervisors have expressed support for a vote to leave.

In the West Virginia Senate, Sen. Charles Trump has offered a resolution urging Frederick County to join West Virginia.

Closer to Washington, Loudoun County was recently home to a short-lived effort to split, with some in the more rural and conservative western half, which borders West Virginia, bidding to create their own county called Catoctin for the mountains that provide a border.

Howell said that he has a team working on how any merger would work. He said that since West Virginia operates much like Virginia, it would be easy to merge police and infrastructure.

He also said that border shifts do not need federal approval.

“We’ve been looking way down the road. Once we realized that this was getting very real, we figured that we have to have answers for this, we have to have a plan in place. That’s what we’ve been discussing,” he told Secrets.