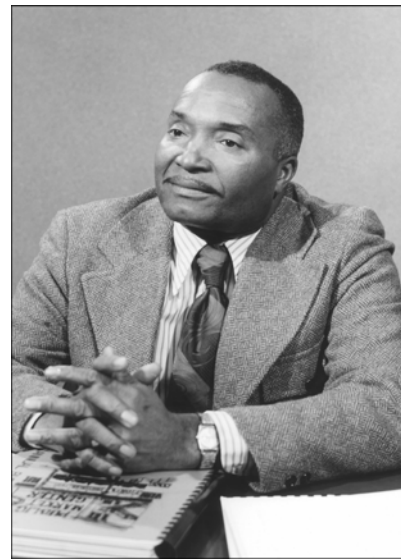


Excerpt from *Samuel J. Smith: An Oral History*

Samuel J. Smith of Seattle represented the 37th District in Washington's House of Representatives from 1959 to 1967. Smith was active in the civil rights movement and served on the Seattle City Council for twenty-four years after he left the Legislature. In this excerpt from his oral history interview, Smith recalls how the 1965 redistricting compromise affected his district, which was shaped in such a bizarre way it reminded him of a puppy dog. He uses the analogy to comment on the sometimes bewildering and partisan reasons behind the shifting boundaries of redistricting. The transcript of the Smith interview was edited into a narrative format and is available in its entirety on the Oral History Program Web site.

The 1965 session wasn't so much of a stalemate as the 1963 coalition session. But we had another big problem: redistricting. We couldn't agree on redistricting in 1963, so there was a series of court decisions and appeals, all the way to the Supreme Court. Then the district court ruled that we couldn't pass any legislation in 1965 until we passed a redistricting bill. We could introduce bills, hold hearings, and committees could act, but we couldn't pass bills.

Redistricting is unique. It's an issue all to itself. It's not for the people, it's for politicians. Politicians try their best to make it sound like it's for the people, but it isn't. Each politician is out to keep his district the same, and everybody else wants to change that district. Nobody comes up voluntarily, wanting to change the district and give up some of his voters. So it starts as a conflict, and the major politicians who have the power—they're the ones who succeed. They always take care of themselves first, then the rest go on from there.



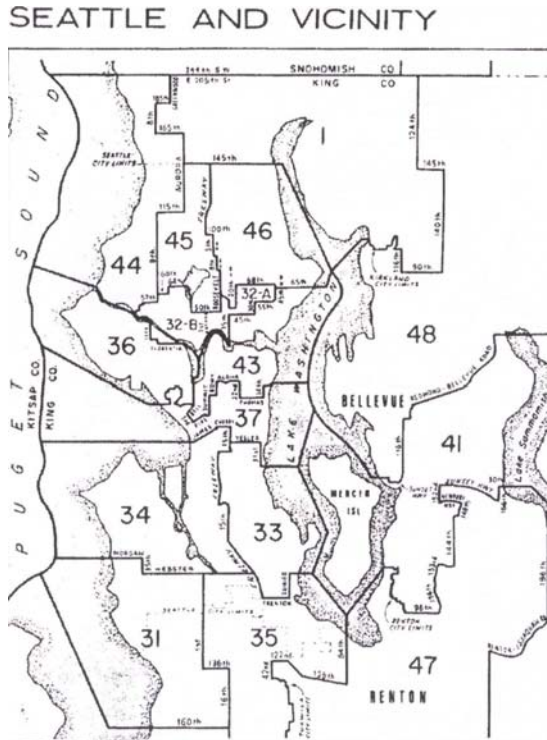
Sam Smith

... We tried to get a redistricting bill passed before Governor Evans was inaugurated. In this bill the Democrats protected Senator Fred Dore more than they protected me. They took some of my district that I had revived by getting people to register and vote. They took it away from me. It was a deliberate lessening of my strength. Like I said, I had done the unthinkable job of getting people registered in my district. People who had no desire to register, I had gotten them registered. They were voting for me. And the Legislature, by its action, it was transferring those people to other districts. And I wanted to keep them for myself. I was upset. I had believed that the Legislature wouldn't purposely do that, and I found that they were doing it, and I was upset. I felt that most of it was personal where I was concerned. Senator Fred Dore was still afraid I would get more votes than he would, and he wanted to cut down my ability to do that. The people who were in control of the redistricting agreed with him.

... A Senate compromise was proposed, a combination of a Senate bill and House bill. . . when this compromise bill was before the House I spoke out against it. I didn't let them keep it a secret. People still comment on that speech—they call it my "puppy dog" speech. I took a map I had created of the bill's districts and showed them how much my district was like a puppy dog, and I said, "He's eating out of a can." I spoke at length about the powerful people who were trying to so-called "get me," and take away my constituents, and said how I felt strongly about it. In the speech I referred to two senators,

one was Dore and the other was Greive; he was the main Senate power at that time. When I vented my feelings the House was completely quiet. They were listening to it, but they didn't talk about it to me. It was a conversation piece among themselves. I knew that because I knew how to just keep my ears open.

My speech didn't change the way they voted. The bill passed. Six Democrats who had been in the coalition voted for it. And enough other Democrats joined with them and the Republicans so that it would pass. I felt so strongly that when the bill passed I went to my hotel room and cried. That was the first time in the Legislature that I had ever been so emotionally moved. You take your duties as a legislator very personally and when redistricting does such negative things to you, you just lose heart.



The odd shape of the 37th District is highlighted in this 1965 map of King County.

**The map is taken from Members of the Legislature: 1889-2001 (Olympia: Washington State Legislature, 2001):153.*