



PUTTING CITIZENS FIRST

Testimony to the Commission to
Ensure Integrity and Public
Confidence in State Government

Dr. Bob Holsworth, November 14,
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Restoring Public Confidence

- The title of the Commission is aptly named
- Throughout the country, we see a loss of confidence in public institutions- 14% congressional approval in recent Gallup Poll
- Loss of confidence is not related to a single event or a single institution, but requires addressing a range of challenges
- I would advocate a basic grounding principle: put the interests of citizens first.

The Independent Bipartisan Commission on Redistricting

- Formed by Governor McDonnell in response to organized advocacy
- 11 members, 5R's, 5D's, 1IND
- 1 staff member, 8 advisers, Christopher Newport University as key support
- Worked in conjunction with the College and University Redistricting Commission

The Commission's Charge

- Focus on contiguous and compact districts
- Comply with the Voting Rights Act
- Utilize the 2010 Census numbers
- Reflect boundary lines of existing political divisions to the maximum extent possible
- Preserve communities of interest
- Exclude political criteria such as partisan advantage and electoral competition.

The Commission's Process

- Studied and incorporated legal and constitutional mandates, with special attention to the Voting Rights Act
- Held public forums across the Commonwealth, hearing from private citizens, elected officials and organizational representatives.
- Examined student maps and instructed our advisers to produce maps based on Commission dialogue
- Developed a set of "maps" for congressional, state Senate, and state House districts
- Delivered final report

Public Forum Themes

- Consensus on the need for reform
- Communities of interest are separated for inappropriate reasons
- Too much splitting of municipal and county jurisdictions
- Redistricting has a negative impact on political competition
- **The dominant theme was that redistricting has made politics opaque and bewildering**

Virginia College Competition

- 2 Divisions- one utilized the Commission's charge, a second division included competitive considerations
- 155 students, produced 55 plans, from 16 teams, and 13 colleges, undergraduate, graduate, and law school teams
- Competition was judged by Thomas Mann and Norm Ornstein
- A number of plans significantly influenced the Commission's thinking

The Commission's Work: Identifying Standards/Metrics

- There is often a lack of transparency on the criteria that guide redistricting
- Commission identified 4 basic criteria
 - Voting rights considerations
 - Equal population standards
 - Compactness
 - Number of jurisdictions split
- Commission proposed specific metrics for each criterion:
 - VRA- DOJ 2001 standards
 - Equal population- absolute for Congress- 2%-3% for state districts
 - Compactness- Schwartzberg compactness measure-compared to 2001 results
 - Split Jurisdictions- actual number compared to 2001 results

This was the first time public and visible criteria were employed

Model Maps

- Commission proposed “model maps” for congressional redistricting, state Senate redistricting, and state House redistricting
- All Commission maps maintained or expanded majority minority-minority districts, were more compact than 2001 results, and split fewer jurisdictions
- Commission identified the percentage of population variation permitted as an important factor in reducing split jurisdictions in state Senate redistricting
- Commission’s work was widely praised on the state’s editorial pages

Three Approaches

- **Incumbent and Partisan Centered-** approach privileges incumbent protection and partisan advantage
- **System Centered-** approach focuses on maximizing political goals such as competition
- **Citizen Centered-** approach focuses on maximizing ease of citizen understanding and engagement with the political process

The Competition Question

- Redistricting reform is likely to enhance a modest level of political competition.
- But will not in itself address a range of other factors that limit competition
 - Residential choice- Cracker Barrel and Whole Food Counties
 - Nationalization of politics
 - Ideological conformity within the parties

Recommendations

- Be citizen-centered in your approach and recommendations
- Ensure that whatever process is recommended obtains significant public input about communities of interest
- Give the recommended process sufficient time to work -6 to 12 months
- I prefer bipartisan to nonpartisan representation, if only because I think that it is more faithful to actual reality.