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**HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON REDISTRICTING**

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OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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HOW WE GOT HERE

I want to start by summarizing where we are today and how we got here. The current districts that we are living with are based upon partisan gerrymandered maps, drawn to benefit the political party and the politicians in power, at the expense of Oregonians.

The League of Women Voters has recognized inherent dangers when it comes from redistricting to protect those in power, explaining that "...incumbent gerrymanders mean that legislators may exercise self-interest to create a plan that unfairly protects incumbents by minimizing competition."

Former Secretary of State Dennis Richardson stated in his Redistricting Reform Task Force Report that the redistricting process in Oregon "is susceptible to political manipulation," and described the 2011 redistricting effort as a "pro-incumbent map that placed the interests of politicians ahead of the interests of the citizens."

It's well known that our current maps were drawn for the purpose of benefitting one political party, and its incumbents. Oregonians deserve to have nonpartisan maps, as the law and Oregon Constitution require.

Looking at statewide races gives us an idea of how purple the state truly is, with the winner of the 2018 Governor's race earning 50.1 percent of the vote, and yet under the current, partisan gerrymandered maps, Democrats control more than 60 percent of state House seats and 80 percent of Oregon's congressional seats.

For these reasons and more, the Willamette Week recently reported that the only way Oregon's new sixth congressional seat can favor the current majority is with gerrymandering.

With all this in mind, we have an opportunity to fix our legislative and congressional districts to be truly nonpartisan and representative of Oregonians.

OUR PRINCIPLES

Throughout this process we have remained committed to a non-partisan proposal based upon the United States Constitution, the Oregon Constitution and Oregon law.

Our principles come from specific criteria outlined by state law. These include:

- Making sure that no district is drawn for the purposes of favoring any political party or incumbent or diluting the voting strength of any language of ethnic minority.
- Keeping counties, cities and school districts whole.
- Preserving communities of common interests.
- Ensuring that populations for each district be closely matched.
- Avoid crossing geographic or political boundaries and maintain transportation links.

These are the key principles we followed for the creation of our maps.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

Another important consideration for us was the creation of maps based upon nonpartisan considerations, as Oregonians have asked for.

Throughout the past year of public testimony, we have heard directly from people who don't currently feel well represented by partisan maps. Our goal has been to address the failings that have led to their feeling misrepresented.

It is particularly important that the new congressional maps be nonpartisan, given that Oregon is getting a new congressional seat. More people are moving to our State, and they deserve representation based upon their communities of interests, not the partisan advantage of any political party.

One area that generated many comments regarding state house districts came from communities surrounding the University of Oregon.

Currently we have an urban area that silences the voices of rural communities. Neighborhoods around the U of O campus are included in a predominately rural district to determine a specific partisan outcome.

We know when you pair college students with small town residents 45 miles away to one party's political advantage, that's gerrymandering. These Oregonians don't have much in common, so they shouldn't be represented by the same person. Testimony from their own House member agreed:

Representative Marty Wilde in March pointed out that his district crosses Interstate 5 in two places, includes two separate parts of Springfield and captures a small chunk of Eugene. “We can do better,” he said.

The argument is that you can’t create a complete map without combining rural and urban communities. However, we were able to do this if we stop using redistricting to help the political party and incumbent politicians in power. It’s possible and it’s what the people of Oregon want for better balance and representation.

We also heard from many Oregonians living on the coast who are represented by districts stretching into west Portland. They told us repeatedly, residents on the coast have nothing in common with people living in the wealthy suburbs of west Portland neighborhoods. Combining these dissimilar communities in state or congressional districts means many people will be misrepresented, a result of gerrymandering.

CONCLUSION

Our current districts have diluted the voices of Oregonians for two decades, to advance one political party and incumbent politicians. That’s why good government groups, businesses and NAACP branches pleaded in a letter to House Democrat and Republican lawmakers in June for a hearing on an independent redistricting commission. They believed it was the only way to fix our maps and create districts that better represent Oregonians.

But the Legislature still has an opportunity to accomplish this task in a fair, nonpartisan and transparent way that gives a voice to more Oregonians who have been silenced by gerrymandering.

That was our mission with this proposal, and I look forward to accomplishing the goal of fairness and equal representation for the state in this committee.



Representative Shelly Boshart Davis
Co-Chair House Redistricting Committee