

Dear Redistricting Committee:

No one can possibly have missed the divisions in our nation and in our state, fueled by grievances and resentment against “those others” who don’t live as “we” think “they” should. Every disagreement seems to have become a conflict giving rise to battles (both metaphoric and, sadly, literal) that will only be “won” when “they” do what “we” want them to do.

As long as the political goal is the above described “win,” we become less able to reach the reasonable compromises that were long thought to be the art of politics. And compromise is essential, because “we” and “they” (or us v them, if you prefer) do in fact have different lives, concerns, and priorities.

I spent decades as an urbanite, and 15 years working in San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood. I know urban realities from the underside. My wife and I had to move out of San Francisco when my dying father’s medical paperwork took over our small apartment and we couldn’t afford rent elsewhere in the city. We moved to the last stop on the trans bay commuter bus. Now we are happy as rural Oregonians, on a small (burned) F2 woodland in Vida in Eastern Lane County. And now we have a better viewpoint on some of the tensions in our communities.

Urban and rural realities are different. This doesn’t mean that everyone should move to the woods; nor does it mean we should all concentrate in the cities. It does, however, mean that one-bill-fits-all legislating cannot serve all Oregonians. It also means that it is exceedingly dangerous for a “majority” to impose ways of life on a population they do not understand. Were I living in Eugene, I would probably support taxes on “oversized” tires and diesel gas; living in Vida, we couldn’t do the work of post-fire reforestation and care of the land without our pickup truck and the Lane Forest trucks that deliver soil and amendments. If we were living in Eugene, we also wouldn’t be trying to plant and keep alive 300+ carbon sequestering trees per acre on over 35 acres of burned land.

All of this underscores the importance of ensuring that redistricting allows for all voices to be heard. I urge you to oppose any gerrymandering or undue partisan influence in the upcoming redistricting process. Oregonians across the state expect maps to be drawn so that communities of common interest like school districts and neighborhoods are left intact. You must ensure that rural Oregonians are kept in districts with similar population density, and not drawn into districts with a higher population density and different needs.

I ask that you ensure all Oregonians receive the representation they deserve.

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