

My Name is Wendy B. Gessler.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the committees on redistricting for allowing me to share my input and narrative in this very important, once in a decade process that will undoubtedly have a huge impact on our legislative elections for years to come, at least 10 years.

I am descended from the Choctaw Tribe and Scots Irish refugees. People say that I am lucky, since I inherited the lighter features of my mother and appear white. In some places it wouldn't matter so much. However, in Oregon, with its historically racist reputation, that still boils, not so much under the surface, I must admit it is fortunate.

I have lived in Madras, Oregon a number of years now. I am speaking for myself, as I have no family here. When I first moved here racism was more of a whisper that thinking minds tried to ignore. Now it is worn as a badge of honor and flouted on vehicles and flags, along with the most vulgar proclamations against our current President, without any of the laws against such signage being enforced by local police or the county sheriff. And it isn't just racism, it is blatant hostility exhibited toward BIPOC individuals, women and girls, anyone suspected to be LGBTQ+, and anyone the dominant white male "supremacy" culture sees as an "other". Sadly, I have seen men who don't have these racist prejudices bend to peer pressure out of fear. Even worse, local government officials seem to harbor this same fear. With the right Congressional and House District maps, I truly believe equitable and diverse legislative districts can reflect our rich diversity without dividing and diluting our communities of common interest into silence. This is particularly true for the Native American and Latin/x populations that contribute so much to what has made Oregon a sought-after home and travel destination in the past. But, who will come now?

I don't know what happens to make a person discard everything one has learned and knows about science, along with any sign of human compassion, during a time when we are met with the most catastrophic threat to life and livelihoods our nation has ever faced. And this antithetical, conspiracy-driven, sadly partisan behavior is unique to the United States. Members of my community seem to be competing with Florida for the most ludicrous, ill-advised behavior. In the news on the coast and even across the nation, the ant-maskers and antivaxxers of Central Oregon are headlines, giving our forest fires poor coverage, while the majority of us are closed-up in our homes due to the Covid-19 Delta variant and noxious smoke that have descended upon our community, and now threaten our children. And nowhere is it felt worse than among our Native and Latin/x members of the community. And they/I currently have no voice to influence any change. And tomorrow our county plans to consider dropping the mask mandate for health care first responders and hospital employees so they won't quit. This after doctors and scientists have stated that the U.S. is expected to lose 40,000 lives during the month of September to the Delta variant. These decisions do not represent the majority of rural Oregonians. They are a byproduct of fear, the fear generated by the irrational and intimidating behavior of rural Oregon white males.

Our extended community is not represented by these caricatures of Central Oregon. But this ill-advised "rebel" behavior of white males is touted as the face of rural Oregon, while nothing could be further from the truth. The majority of us wear masks, take precautions, and take care of others in the community. We understand the risks and dangers of this virus, and we take the precautions necessary to prevent illness of ourselves and others. But we aren't the ones making the news. And news of our BIPOC friends and family is nonexistent.

We all know what fueled the fires of this irrational white supremacy into an inferno. But it is clear that no one is stepping forward who is willing and/or able to effectively douse the flames. This might have been avoidable if, after the 2010 census, we hadn't been gerrymandered into a giant racially lopsided expanse of a district. And this 2nd district is dominated by rural white males who quash any notion of equal representation for the rural BIPOC community, among others, and effectively eliminates the most basic tenet of America's democracy: Equal Representation.

Fortunately, you, committee members, have the opportunity to move the districts of Oregon forward in a way that would not only provide equal and fair representation for all Rural Central Oregonians, but also bring about a spirit of cooperation and compromise in how we meet the challenges of climate change as one diverse community/district, and by extension, state, with a shared goal. A diverse community is a thriving community because members must work together. At least that is the conclusion of the sociological scholars, who drive responsible and diverse small town and urban growth. One need only consider cities like New York and Miami. And I have personally witnessed this on a smaller scale, with the beneficial coalescing of diverse ethnicities into a rich, unified community with a shared vision for progress, as well as shared resources to meet any challenges the community might encounter, where I lived the majority of my years, Delray Beach, Florida. I just happen to like snow and mountains now. But this was a southern town that had race riots and bussing protests as recent as 1980. So, it can be done.

Climate change, with its drought and water shortages, forest fires, and air quality challenges cost us millions every year now, if not more. That is a concern of every Rural Central Oregonian. Ask any farmer with his land for sale. The people indigenous to this area are experts at resource management, knowing what can be grown for a profit, when and where. The challenges our collective community must adapt to can foster innovation and a new age of entrepreneurship, given the benefit of an equal and diverse community. There are a lot of recommended criteria for drawing a map, and many of these rules can conflict with one another, resulting in other things being a priority. For the first time, racial equity must be prioritized in rural Oregon. This action will benefit us all.

I have reviewed the vast majority of Committee and publicly submitted maps on ESRI, and I support the map titled "House bsmith78 21-09-08". This map provides for a more equal distribution of Native communities and adjacent Latinx populations that share common interests and face common issues and challenges. This map would finally allow Native Americans to have a greater influence over the decisions that will impact their sacred fishing and burial areas, as well as the tribal communities. Our own Warm Springs would no longer have its voting power diluted to nothing by communities it has nothing in common with. It would also create a senate district that the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and the Klamath Tribes could share. And this map also creates a more balanced representation of demographics across the board, in my opinion. It just makes sense.

Additionally, I support the ESRI site's publicly submitted Congressional map titled "Congress bsmith78 21-09-08". It creates much of the same diversity and equity so desperately needed. Since these maps will influence so much that we do in the coming years, equal representation is more of a necessity than a choice.