

March 10, 2021

Senator Kathleen Taylor, Chair
Senate Committee on Redistricting
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Taylor:

In November 1990, I was elected to the Nevada Assembly. During Nevada's 1991 legislative session I experienced first-hand the redistricting process. As a freshman legislator, I did not have much say or influence in the drawing of my district's boundaries. However, having been elected to a district that was slightly republican in voter registration, I did ask for a few more democrats within the new district's lines. And, indeed, that was the outcome. It should be noted that 1991 was one of those years in Nevada that Democrats held the majority in both the Senate and Assembly as well as the governor's office.

Over the course of the next 30 years, as a legislator and lobbyist, I have followed the redistricting process in Nevada and then in Oregon. It has been my observation that the primary goal of a Legislature's redistricting efforts is to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, the status quo. To ensure that the majority party stays in the majority and that incumbents retain their legislative seats. A secondary goal but equally important is that the legislature's redistricting plan meets various federal requirements and can withstand any legal challenges.

With all due respect, while I appreciate the political considerations associated with the current redistricting process and self-interest being a part of human nature, the fact is that elected officials drawing the lines of their own districts does not lend itself to an open and unbiased process. Instead, what is needed is a process that provides (to the extent possible): the promotion of partisan fairness; preservation and protection of "communities of interest"; and respect for boundaries of municipalities and counties.

It is with this in mind that I urge the Oregon Senate Committee on Redistricting to propose a constitutional amendment to create an independent citizens' redistricting commission. A commission similar to the proposed by People No Politicians in 2020 (IP 57). An independent commission would provide a process that is citizen-oriented, transparent and equitable.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rick Bennett
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Senate District 3