

March 15, 2021

Dear Chair Salinas and Committee Members,

Re: Support for HJR-7

We are Gordon and Gail Culbertson constituents of HD 11, small family forest owners and residents of Lane County. Three generations of our timber growing family are proud to have been recognized as State of Oregon Tree Farmers of the year for 2019.

We live in the rural countryside surrounded by farms and forests. Our community provides food, fiber and shelter needed by all of society. Many of our urban neighbors have little understanding or appreciation for the work we do.

Representation in our Legislature is one of the most significant rights of a citizen of Oregon. When partisan political interests assert control and threaten the legitimacy of this process, the liberty of all citizens is at risk.

State statute for creation of Legislative Districts seek to “utilize existing geographic or political boundaries” and to not “divide communities of common interest”. Further, “Communities of common interest” “is a broad term that can mean any subpopulation that expresses an interest in occupying the same district”.

It is highly unfortunate that Oregon suffers from a perceived or actual, depending on your point of view, “urban versus rural divide”. This is damaging to public discourse and impedes successful dialogue and genuine “give and take” with the peoples work in our legislative body.

In Lane County, rural voters like ourselves, are disenfranchised by “gerrymandered” House Districts 8 & 11. In each case these Districts are at least 90 % forest and farmland, populated by rural citizens whose livelihood depends on “working the land”. Each of these districts is “rooted” by a small geographic area with significant populace across “geographic boundaries” of Eugene making it highly suspect a candidate representing the “common interest” for a large “subpopulation” of rural voters will be represented or even considered.

This situation has endured in Lane County for the past two decades under the scheme that has favored candidates with politically inspired districting. Urban centric legislators elected by a reliable urban majority have ruled with little regard for rural parts of the District.

Oregon’s population is diverse and has a variety of economic and cultural interests. Government works best when all communities are represented by legislators that understand and respect constituent values. The alternative is the status-quo where under-represented voices are ignored or paid lip service to concerns resulting in growing division.

A nonpartisan re-districting process is an absolute necessity to assure the integrity of legislative representation. We ask the legislature to support HJR-7 calling for an independent and impartial commission to redraw districts considering the electorate. Rural Lane County citizens have suffered inequitable representation based on violation of principles for “geographic boundaries” and “common community interests”. Rural regions of Districts 8 & 11 should be combined, separating them from the unique and culturally different sections of the Districts within the confines of the City of Eugene.

Sincerely,

Gordon and Gail Culbertson

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