

April 10, 2021

Co-Chairs Taylor, and Salinas, Vice-Chairs, Knopp, and Boshart-Davis, and members of the redistricting committees,

My name is Eric Swenson and I live in Marion County and House District 22 and serve as the Mayor of Woodburn, though I am not speaking today on behalf of the city council or my city government.

I will speak from my own perspective as an instructor of classes on Culture and Identity I have taught at Willamette, Lewis and Clark and currently Pacific University as well as my experience as a middle and high school principal in Woodburn.

I understand there are as many considerations for your redistricting committee as there are groups that want make sure their voices are represented. As an elected official I also understand that we are role models.

I can tell you unequivocally from the research and my own experience that having role models that you perceive to be like you in some way is crucial to the way you are likely to perceive yourself and not only your chances, but your ability, to perform in roles that they represent. All the role models my over 2000 students have played a key role in who they have become. And role models from cultures different from theirs changed the way they looked at others - who they previously saw as other.

We know that it's true that children who see people they can relate to, and yes, who look and sound like them, are much more likely to envision themselves being the same: girls as scientists, mathematicians and plumbers, the farm kid as a doctor and the doctor's kid as a farmer - and to an important point among many for you to consider: Latinx, Indigenous, Black and Asian children and any others who may not see themselves as elected officials - no small thing as we strive for a government for, of and by the people.

In my own district it's what propelled Anna Kasachev, to take the courageous step out from the Old Believer Russian community's centuries old tradition of shunning all things government to run for this august body – and now two members of the that community are running for our school board - and I recently approved the application of Mihei Egoroff to the City of Woodburn Budget Committee.

After State Representative Alonso Leon became the first indigenous Latina legislator, three Latinx members of our community ran for school board and now we are the first minority-majority school board in the state – this after nearly three decades of our Latinx students being the majority in the district.

As a principal at Woodburn High school I had the honor of accompanying 10 migrant education students to Washington DC where they studied and debated current issues alongside black kids from Philly, white kids from Tennessee, Native American Students from Oklahoma and Asian students from L.A.

Before leaving for our nation's capital, Representative Alonso Leon hosted them all for a day. As we sat in the gallery looking down at her amongst the other 60 representatives the inspiration was palpable. But those exceptionally bright students, whose culture represents more than 1 in 7 Oregonians, were doing the math. Representation mattered to them.

One thing we all know as elected officials is the need and responsibility we have to engage those who elected us in the processes of government – even, and particularly, in this case: one of the messiest parts of democracy: redistricting. Even under difficult time frames more engagement is better in this complicated process that is crucial to ensuring representative democracy.