
Commission Meeting

of

NEW JERSEY REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

*"Testimony from the public on the establishment of congressional districts
in New Jersey that will be in effect for the next 10 years"*

LOCATION: Winants Hall
Rutgers University - New Brunswick
New Brunswick, New Jersey

DATE: October 11, 2011
3:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMISSION PRESENT:

John J. Farmer Jr., Chair
Assemblyman Joseph Roberts Jr., Delegation Chair
Michael J. Baker, Delegation Vice Chair
Michael Duhaime, Delegation Chair
Assemblywoman Caroline Casagrande
Sherine El-Abd
Edward Farmer
Aubrey Fenton
Jeannine Frisby LaRue
Eric Jaso
M. Susan Sheppard
Philip Thigpen



ALSO PRESENT:

Frank J. Parisi
Raysa Martinez Kruger
*Office of Legislative Services
Commission Secretaries*

*Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey*

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JOHN J. FARMER JR. (Chair): Good afternoon, everybody.

I want to welcome everybody to this third public hearing of the congressional Redistricting Commission.

Our first witness this afternoon is going to be Ed Potosnak.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF COMMISSION:

(Indiscernible) take the roll first.

MR. J. FARMER: Oh, yes; I'm sorry.

Mr. Secretary, do you want to call the roll?

MR. PARISI (Commission Secretary): Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

Michael Baker.

MR. BAKER: Here.

MR. PARISI: Caroline Casagrande.

MR. J. FARMER: I understand she's going to be late.

MR. PARISI: Okay.

Nilsa Cruz-Perez -- I understand that she's absent.

Michael Duhaime.

MICHAEL DUHAIME (Delegation Chair): Here.

MR. PARISI: Sherine El-Abd.

MS. EL-ABD: Here.

MR. PARISI: Edward Farmer.

MR. E. FARMER: Here.

MR. PARISI: Aubrey Fenton.

MR. FENTON: Here.

MR. PARISI: Jeannine Frisby LaRue.

MS. LaRUE: Here.

MR. PARISI: Eric Jaso.

MR. JASO: Here.

MR. PARISI: Speaker Roberts.

JOSEPH ROBERTS JR. (Delegation Chair): Here.

MR. PARISI: Susan Sheppard.

MS. SHEPPARD: Here.

MR. PARISI: Phil Thigpen.

MR. J. FARMER: I think he's here, but parking.

MR. PARISI: Okay.

Dean Farmer.

MR. J. FARMER: Here.

MR. PARISI: You have a quorum.

MR. J. FARMER: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Potosnak, it doesn't indicate on your form if you are affiliated with any kind of organization or governmental entity. Could you identify that, please?

ED POTOSNAK: Absolutely.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to join you here. My name is Ed Potosnak. I'm a science teacher; I'm also a small business owner. I am a double grad from Rutgers, and I'm actually teaching at the Graduate School of Education here on this campus in New Brunswick. And in addition, in 2010 I was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 7th Congressional District.

I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about the redistricting process and the critical issues that are facing you as you go

about this -- and that is making the districts more competitive and compact to ensure that we have a vibrant and representative democracy.

As I campaigned in 2010 across the sprawling 7th Congressional District, many people told me that they were not going to participate in the election because they felt that their vote didn't matter; that the election was predetermined; that, in fact, the district was a Republican district.

And I fear that's becoming all too prevalent in our elections -- that it's creating doubts in the legitimacy of American democracy and that it's a major factor in the hyper-partisanship that we're seeing, making, as a result, the ineffective Congress that we have today.

We need more competitive districts. And the problem really presents itself quite clearly when -- elections like we had in 2010, when Congress is at the top of the ticket. And in the 7th Congressional District, what we saw is that the number of voters that came out dropped 40 percent over what we saw in a presidential year. That's about 22,000 voters less -- about 11 percent -- than we see in a Senate election.

Likewise, I believe that that hyper-partisan nature and the gridlock in Washington is encouraged by these safe districts, because our elected officials are catering to the very extreme portions of their party -- because the only elections that matter are the primaries. And you can end that partisanship in Washington by making these congressional districts more competitive.

A competitive district is one in which a candidate stands a chance of winning if he or she gets enough voters. And that means in any election, not just these wave elections. And these competitive districts will

help to reduce the partisanship, because representatives must represent all of the people in the district, and not just those who are aligned with their own party. It will ensure that voters are not disenfranchised by the partisan elections; it will end predetermined elections, and improve turnout and community engagement.

Compactness is another important factor to weigh when drawing the congressional districts. Compactness gives constituents greater access to their representatives and increases the accountability of our elected officials. Greater access and accountability will also help to decrease that hyper-partisanship, and help to rebuild a robust democracy in New Jersey and throughout America.

As many of you know, with the decreased profitability of newspapers there are fewer and fewer reporters, and those reporters have to cover an expanding number of areas and issues. And this makes covering members of Congress even more difficult, which contributes to a wider gap between constituents and their members, and really results in less accountability. So the sprawling districts also make communicating with constituents more difficult for members of Congress and makes it much more expensive for our taxpayers.

So additionally, these reporters are less able to pay as close attention to representatives in Washington, because they, many times, only have a sliver of the district in their circulation area. Sometimes they have to cover three, four, or even five members of Congress. And right here in Middlesex County, the *Home News Tribune* covers Lance, Pallone, Sires, and-- I guess I got them all -- four (*sic*). That's a lot. It's a very difficult task, and often when the district work period happens it happens all at the

same time, and they're having events and they're doing things throughout the district -- and we're lucky if we get coverage of one of those folks. It's really all but impossible to have effective coverage in that situation. And this results in a lack of accountability for our members of Congress.

Compact districts geographically arranged by media area would improve the communication for all members and their constituents, and reduce the costs and improve accountability.

So if you're like me and most residents of New Jersey, you're tired of the political theater in Washington, D.C., between Democrats and Republicans, and you believe that a robust democracy is key to keeping America competitive in the global economy. Therefore, I implore you to make these districts more competitive and compact.

The task of redistricting is challenging given the fact that we're losing a congressional district; and I'm confident if you make these districts more competitive and compact, New Jersey and our nation will benefit greatly.

I want to thank you for the work you're doing and for the opportunity to address you today.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you.

Anybody have any questions for Mr. Potosnak? (no response)

Thank you for your testimony.

Next we have Michael Ryan from Harrington Park, New Jersey, representing himself.

M I C H A E L B. R Y A N: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. It's an honor to be here, and I thank you for the opportunity.

I have a few words and they -- I will be relatively brief. And I would ask for the permission to submit a written memorandum subsequently to support my oral.

MR. J. FARMER: Absolutely.

MR. RYAN: Thank you very much.

I must say I am the Chair of the Legislative District 39 Republican Committee; however, I am not here on behalf of that Committee. That Committee has not taken any position with respect to the redistricting. And I am speaking solely for myself.

MR. J. FARMER: Understood.

MR. RYAN: I've come here to speak, in particular, about the redistricting as it affects the present 5th Congressional District. And I'm asking -- and I'll give reasons why -- that the district, the present configuration of that district, remain substantially unchanged, and that the municipalities that need to be added to fulfill constitutional requirements have substantially the same characteristics as the municipalities that are presently in that district. And I ask that because the present district has extraordinarily positive and numerous communities of interest amongst its residents. And I believe that that condition should continue.

I'd just like to briefly mention some of them: It is a suburban district. Now, that's no different from an urban district in the sense that both districts have needs to be represented, and the suburban part of our state is entitled to have a unity so that its common interests can have a representative. The cities have them; the suburbs have them; but the more distant suburbs, I submit, are also entitled to have a community of interest that is recognized in the form of a legislator who is familiar with the

conditions within the district, familiar with the needs of the people in the district, and who has the capacity and the interest to work to try to fulfill those communities of interest.

Very briefly, those interests include the character of the municipalities: mostly small, mostly lightly populated -- specifics will be presented to you. The municipalities and the boards of education within those districts receive -- are funded-- Their expenses are funded almost entirely from real estate property taxes. The amount of State aid they receive is -- for municipalities -- very modest. The amount of State aid they receive for educating their children is small, smaller, and smallest. It might average \$400 per year per student. Some places in the State of New Jersey receive, maybe, \$25,000 a year per student. Now, I'm not getting into the constitutional requirements for that imbalance, but I do submit to you that the people who live in such an extended community of interest should have somebody who tries to introduce a fairer system of State aid for those municipalities and the residents in those municipalities. And if it can't be introduced through the State legislature, perhaps there is something that could be done on a Federal level. So I ask you to consider that factor.

The municipalities typically have small workforces. The people in the municipalities join together for ambulance service, emergency medical team service, volunteer fire departments, and an ongoing list of volunteer activities that are intended to benefit the people in the municipalities and their neighbors. There are many shared services between these suburban towns -- another reason why the suburban community should have a legislator who knows the suburban needs and is prepared to

work to help satisfy them or, that is, to provide the materials that are needed to continue them.

I could go on; we all could go on, but just to call your attention to a couple of, perhaps, less familiar items that make up the community of interest.

Commuter rail transit is a major means of workers getting to their places of employment, and that is throughout the 5th Congressional District. I'm personally familiar with the aspects in Bergen County: there's the Pascack Valley Line, the Bergen Line; there are many lines. And that type of transportation is important to the suburbanites in the present 5th District and adjoining areas.

Flooding due to storm waters -- well, that is perhaps more timely and topical. Hurricane Irene produced major problems in Bergen and Passaic counties as a result of flooding of homes and public places. There ought to be a representative of the people in those areas who will protect their interest in the Federal legislature.

Almost in conclusion: The community of interest that I'm speaking of and trying to identify to you -- hopefully with some success -- has been recognized by your redistricting predecessors, to my personal knowledge, for over 50 years -- over 60 years, I should say. I believe since 1952 and, quite possibly, for an additional 50 years before that. And that is the northern part of Bergen County, the very northern part of Passaic County, Sussex County, and part of Warren County have been a district for that time. I personally, in 1974 and a few years before, was a constituent aide to former Congressman Widnall and, on many occasions -- he was from Bergen, and one of his district offices was in Bergen -- on many

occasions we spent the weekend traveling to the more westerly parts of the district. So I submit to you that I am not trying to create something new. I am not trying to persuade you to do something that hasn't been done previously. I'm asking you to give respect to the community of interest that exists and that has been recognized as existing for at least 60, and possibly 100 years.

A final point: Should the Committee decide to substantially retain the present configuration of District 5 and adding such municipalities as may be necessary, that decision would provide a firm -- a very firm and solid foundation for your subsequent decisions on redistricting in the rest of the state. It would give you a basis to say, "We have this; what do we do next?" But I just submit that as a final comment.

Thank you for your time and attention. It is greatly appreciate.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you, Mr. Ryan.

Any questions?

Yes, one question

MR. JASO: Do you have any sense of whether the population in the 5th has grown in relation to the rest of the state, versus-- You know, relatively speaking.

MR. RYAN: Relatively speaking, it has not diminished. It's my belief that approximately 80,000 new residents would have to be added to the district. I believe that there has been a modest increase in the district over the census of 10 years ago. But there's been no diminution, for sure.

MR. J. FARMER: Any other questions? (no response)

Thank you for your testimony.

MR. RYAN: Thank you, sir.

MR. J. FARMER: The next witness we'll hear from is Stephen Yellin, representing himself -- from Berkeley Heights.

STEPHEN YELLIN: Thank you very much, members of the Commission, for having these sessions. I think it's a great thing for our democracy.

I know you guys do not have an enviable job. I understand the market in horse heads has risen dramatically since the Committee was opened. (laughter) Apparently all 13 members of the Congressional delegation have invested a great deal, so I don't envy you even one bit in that job. And so I wish you the very best of success in doing your jobs to the best of your ability.

I want to talk today from the perspective of a young New Jerseyan -- a life-long resident. In the interest of disclosure, I am an activist within the Union County Democratic Party, but that is not why I'm here.

As a graduate student here at Rutgers, I speak to a lot of students, and they despair about this country. And they don't despair because of Democrats or Republicans, they despair because they don't think they have a voice in the system. And these students here at Rutgers have a very diverse background -- some are from our suburban areas, some are from urban poverty, some are from our rural hinterlands. But we're all here at Rutgers because we believed that the State University gives us the best opportunity to advance in life. And so when I talk to these people, as someone who's been involved in politics before, I have a sense that they'd like to see members of Congress, leaders in Washington from the President on down, who will try to speak to them as well as to the other constituents who they must serve in a district.

So when I consider that, and when I think about what this redistricting commission can do for the benefit of all the residents of New Jersey, I like to propose a slightly different tact than one that may have been proposed before. And I would argue for communities that are not contiguous as a basis for redistricting. My reason for this is as such: We have a very diverse state. I would argue that it's the most diverse state in the nation. And I believe that when you have towns that are close to each other in distance, such as Elizabeth and my town of Berkeley Heights, there is yet, nonetheless, a great distance -- a far greater gap, perhaps (indiscernible) New Jersey and Alaska -- when it comes to the differences that exist between those communities. But we're not a nation of similar communities; we're a patchwork nation. We're a nation in which you could have urban and suburban and rural, all within a close distance of each other -- an hour away by train. And I think that, as a Commission in charge of determining who will go to Congress from this most diverse state in the nation, I think it is worth looking into the possibility of linking towns that may not, in theory, have much in common. My reason for this is that if you have a Congressman who can be elected from that district, it becomes their responsibility to reach out to as many constituents in all parts of that district as possible. They cannot simply rely on citizens from one part of the district, who are safely Republican or safely Democratic, to win their elections.

It's not necessarily to make districts competitive, but it does make district more representative. And I think that's what we look for in a republic, which is what our system of government really is. We look for citizens to go to Congress to be representative of their population.

And I think that when you have a person who goes to Congress who has a duty to reach out to people -- say, again, from Elizabeth and Berkeley Heights -- they have a duty to try to represent as many of the views of the people in both towns to the best of their ability. I think that's something that ought to be considered. I'm not an expert, obviously, in constitutional law. I'm not an expert in how one draws districts. I do think a salamander -- which is kind of what the 7th looks like right now, or a fishhook, which is what the 6th resembles -- may not be the best way to draw a map. But I'm not a cartographer either. But what I would say, though, is that I think, as a redistricting commission, that when you have the opportunity, as you do only once a decade, to do something that will affect people so fundamentally, I argue that perhaps it is time for something new, something different -- perhaps a little crazy, for lack of a better term.

But I think that in these difficult times people are not looking for the same old, same old. And I think that you all have the ability to say to them, "You're right. This is something different, something new."

And you know, this nation is based on a bold experiment to begin with. Who would have ever thought a democracy, in 1776, could actually work?

So in closing, let me simply say that as a young American, as someone who cares and loves this country very deeply, and one who shares the sentiments of so many of my fellow young students here at Rutgers -- who do care about this country and do want to contribute -- the best way to show that yes, we care about all of us, regardless of the hometowns we come from, is to link us by those hometowns that cause us to come together as communities, to embrace what brings us together and not what divides us.

So that would be my request to the Committee; whatever that decision may be, of course, is your prerogative, not mine. But I wish you all the very best of success in whatever you choose in crafting a map that will best serve the residents of New Jersey for the next 10 years.

Thank you very much.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you, Mr. Yellin.

Any questions? (no response)

Thank you for your testimony.

MR. YELLIN: Thank you.

MR. J. FARMER: The next witness is Jerome Harris from the New Jersey Black Issues Convention.

Mr. Harris, welcome.

J E R O M E C. H A R R I S: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee. It's a pleasure to appear before you, and I appreciate the opportunity to share with you some observations.

My name is Jerome Harris; I'm Chairman of the New Jersey Black Issues Convention and co-convener of the New Jersey Congressional Redistricting project (*sic*). The project emerged out of our experience of cross-cutting during the legislative redistricting process, where representatives from the African-American community, Latino community, and Asian community shared concerns and ideas regarding how that map should be drawn.

Primary amongst those concerns had to do with the process that was being used and the opportunity for those communities to actively be engaged in that process. From reading the current newspaper reports regarding this process, you guys are being accused of being a smoke-filled

room and, as a consequence, we suggest that you could do a couple things to open the process a little wider -- and they will be included in my recommendations toward the end of my comments.

The Black Issues Convention is a 29-year-old strategic alliance of organizations. We've been active across a wide range of issues including minority health issues, education equity funding, police standards. Our member organizations include the NAACP, the Garden State Bar Association, New Jersey Black Legislative Caucus, Association of Black Women Lawyers, the New Jersey Haitian Council, the Council of Black Republicans, the African-American Chamber of Commerce, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and the National Council of Negro Women -- just to name a few.

The redistricting roundtable has the advantage of our experience, as I said, from the legislative redistricting process. And the Latino Action Network, New Jersey Black Issues Convention are, in fact, co-convening. Our goals are similar as it was in the legislative redistricting process. One is to ensure that the map that is ultimately adopted is constitutional; that the process by which that map is derived is increased in its transparency; that we increase the opportunity for the congressional delegation of New Jersey to be closer to -- reflective of the diversity of the population of the state. Combined, African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians make up almost 40 percent, and our current delegation does not reflect that.

Some of our activities: We intend to continue to monitor the Commission's activity, to make input to the Commission at hearings and other mechanisms. Our job is also to inform the broader community as to

what is going on, what this process is, and what is at stake. We will develop alternative maps and, if necessary, we're prepared to engage in litigation if we believe that any of the voting rights or constitutional issues are not satisfied in the map that you adopt.

So we learned some lessons that I'd like to share with you from the earlier process. First, increased public awareness lends to credibility of the process. When diverse communities, even when they're in conflict, don't know what's going on, they suggest that this process is rigged. Secondly, we recognize and experience that partisan interests dominate this process. And partisan interests even narrow down to the 13 people who will become 12 people in the congressional delegation. As a consequence, the club, if you will -- the difference between this process and the legislative redistricting process was that there were 40 districts engaged, so there were more people who wanted to talk to more people. Now there are only 12, 13. So there are even fewer people who want to talk to us and the community. So as a consequence, those people who already have a very low opinion of Congress and a low opinion of government, and are disconnected from the process, in fact feel -- if we don't do this right, if you don't make this a more inclusive and transparent process, reaching out and making information available -- you will, in fact, have contributed to the sense that we don't have a democracy but, in fact, we have a government where money and politic power and bossism is the only thing that counts.

As I said, the parties don't seek input -- the Republican and Democratic parties don't seek input independently, Mr. Chairman, until it's down to the last straws and they want to have representatives of various constituent groups -- particularly the African-American/Latino communities,

which have the tool of the Voting Rights Act as a vehicle to ensure our participation. It's at the 99th hour that those engagements occur. And I can tell you that despite the fact that a number of the people sitting around the table and the representatives of both parties are very familiar with the work that was done by the Legislative Redistricting Coalition last round, not a telephone call, not a conversation, not an invitation, not even information to say, "Are you going to come testify at the hearings?" have been made.

So I suggest to you that the perception might be that, again, this would be a last minute kind of engagement and involvement. And I think that's not in the best interest of the State of New Jersey, nor the individuals sitting around this table. From what I know of you, individually and collectively, you are folks who, in fact, do care deeply about the task that you have before you and want to do the right thing.

And generally, the public lacks access to information on the process and information about the proposals that will be coming forward. So as we did during the legislative redistricting process, we want to suggest that the Commission make available, in some way, access to the data and software mechanism so that individuals and communities of interest can do their own mapping and analyze yours as you go along. I suggest that you make available -- and I apologize, because I don't know that you haven't done this already, but if you have not -- to create a website where maps can be put up, information and input from the public can be garnered other than through this public hearing process; because I'm not certain that the public understands how to get information to you if they want to. So you've heard today about a number of perspectives on what a community of

interests looks like; I can guarantee you if you open the process you'll get a lot more of that. But I think you getting that information would be important. So I'm suggesting that you have additional mechanisms for input in addition to the public meetings.

And finally, I suggest that you commit to having public hearings when you get down to the two maps -- or the one map that will be presented, so the public has the opportunity to make comments on the map before the final vote. I think that provides an opportunity of not rubber-stamping, not a situation where we have a perception of a lack of openness and transparency. And I think it will contribute substantially to you accomplishing your mission, which is to promote democracy in the State of New Jersey.

We will submit more formal comments to the Commission if there is a mechanism for doing that. And certainly we would like the opportunity to know what the opportunity is, how we should submit any maps that we would like to present to you for your consideration.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Any questions for Mr. Harris? (no response)

I should note: We do have a website. Mr. Secretary, do you want to tell them what the--

MR. PARISI: Yes, the website's address is njredistrictingcommission.org. On that you are able to make comments and submit maps if you so chose; it has copies of all public transcripts and the hearing dates. And that's a way-- Any information that is received on that, I look at and I pass on to the individual delegations. So if your maps are submitted, or if anything else is submitted through there, we pass it on to

the members of the respective delegations, who are members of the Commission.

MR. HARRIS: I respectfully suggest that the Commission make an effort to make that information more broadly known than it is now.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you for your testimony.

Next we'll hear from Gregory McGuckin from Toms River Township.

GREGORY P. MCGUCKIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Greg McGuckin. I am currently in my eighth year as a Councilman in Toms River Township. I've served seven-and-a-half years as Council President of that community. We are currently the eighth-largest municipality in the State of New Jersey pursuant to our last Census.

In full candor, I'm also currently a candidate for State Assembly in the 10th District; however, I'm not here to talk about the politics of this process. I'm here to talk about the geography of this process.

I've learned an awful lot in the past year about redistricting. Toms River, of course, is going through our own redistricting process with our ward system. I also had the opportunity to testify before the Legislative Redistricting Commission in Toms River back in January or so of this past year.

I do have one question of the Commission, and I know there are 13 members. And my first question is: How many of the members are from South Jersey? I believe there's three, and I know Speaker Roberts-- You do have counsel from Toms River for the Democratic side; I'm glad to see Mr. Castner here today, a Toms River native, so that's always good.

The reason I bring that up -- and I brought it up before the State Redistricting Commission for the Legislature -- I do come here before you with a bias, and that's a South Jersey bias. And I think that when you look at the population of the state, and you look at the outcome of the last Census, and you look at the growth of these communities in this portion of the country, clearly the population has moved to the west and to the south here in New Jersey. That really mirrors what's happened nationally -- the population has moved to the south and to the west. And under our system of government, when that happens congressional seats are then moved to the south and the west.

And I think a clear comparison can be made here in New Jersey. Just some certain facts and figures I want to make sure were included in the record: The top five fastest-growing counties in the last 10 years were Ocean County, Gloucester, Somerset, Atlantic, and Middlesex. The largest population increases have been in the southern suburban towns and the northwestern areas of the state -- approximately 220,000 people. Ocean County grew by 12.8 percent in the last 10 years, and has grown over 67 percent since 1980 -- 67 percent. We're currently the sixth-largest county in the State of New Jersey.

As I indicated, Toms River is the eighth-largest town; Lakewood is number seven; Brick is about number 12.

The top five fastest-growing towns in Ocean County have had an average population increase of nearly 35 percent in the past 10 years. Gloucester County has grown over 13 percent; Somerset County and Atlantic County, nearly 9 percent; Middlesex County, 8 percent.

When you look at those numbers and we come to the realization that we must lose a congressional seat and we have to go from 13 to 12 -- I think that when you look at the way congressional seats have been apportioned across the country, I think the same model should be followed here in New Jersey. The population is clearly shifting south and west; over the last 10 years those numbers have increased in those counties and that's where those congressional seats should remain.

One thing I've learned as we've done this redistricting process -- at the State, and now at my local level, I'm here before you today -- it all matters where you start to draw the map, because you will come up with many maps. But when you start to draw the map, you have to start somewhere. And when you start there and then project outwards, that's when you realize that communities and areas are treated, perhaps, differently. I suggest to you, and I suggest to Dean Farmer, that when you begin to draw this map that you start in South Jersey, where the population has increased, and you go forward from there. The population in the south and west has increased; any loss of a congressional seat should come from the north and the east of this state.

Thank you very much.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you.

Any questions? (no response)

Thank you for your testimony.

MR. McGUCKIN: Thank you.

MR. J. FARMER: The next witness is Robert Gordon, who represents the Bayshore Tea Party Group. He's from Middletown, New Jersey.

ROBERT GORDON: Good afternoon.

MR. J. FARMER: Welcome, Mr. Gordon.

MR. GORDON: I'm here this afternoon to present a map that we would like you to take into consideration for this congressional redistricting.

We've taken nothing other than the equal division of the population into 12 districts. We've taken into consideration that these districts are compact and contiguous to the extent that they can be achieved.

Our primary concerns relate to the ending of gerrymandering; consideration that one person, one vote is paramount; and that the continuity of representation should not be of consideration of this Commission in the formulation and adoption of the new map.

That's all I have to say. I'd like to present this map. If there's a particular way we have to go about doing this, we're prepared to provide information electronically.

MR. J. FARMER: The Secretary could receive the physical map, and you can also submit it electronically.

MR. GORDON: Okay, can I do that here, or--

MR. J. FARMER: Sure.

MR. GORDON: Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you for your testimony.

The next witness is Zachary Israel.

Welcome, Mr. Israel.

ZACHARY ISRAEL: Thank you.

Thank you for holding a public meeting so that members of the public can voice their opinion on the crucial issue of redistricting for the next 10 years.

I'm a private citizen of New Jersey; I'm also a student and a young person. I don't represent any political organization or political party. I am just a private citizen who would like to voice his opinion on this, and I hope that you consider what I have to say.

I believe that the American people in general, and a lot of young people as was mentioned before, are disenchanted with the political system. They don't feel that they're being properly represented. And the issue of redistricting our districts for the next 10 years is of the utmost importance. It really gets to the heart of what our country is all about -- representative democracy.

And our districts should be composed in a way that is fair, and there should be certain standards that should be met. And I am of the belief, having worked in-- I should also mention I interned in one or two different congressional offices, in constituent services, in the past. So I have first-hand experience working with constituents from a congressional office in the State of New Jersey. And what I noticed in my experiences was that there are many people in the state -- because certain communities' districts are so gerrymandered, they don't even know who their political representative is. And that's-- I would argue that's a very big problem for not only Americans, but for the people of New Jersey. If you don't know who you're representative is, how are you supposed to voice your opinion? If districts aren't composed and constructed in a way that there are communities of interest -- and I'll get into that in a bit -- then it really

hampers the ability for people to know and participate in their democracy, I think. And that's a problem for all of us.

So the first thing I'll mention is that I am a firm believer in maintaining seniority. And I want to stress that I don't believe in incumbency for the sake of incumbency, but I do believe that in Congress the longer you've been there means more financial resources for the State of New Jersey. And I think that the 13 of you on this Commission, one of the things you should really be looking at is the impact of the new 12 districts, from 13 -- how will that impact financial resources from the Federal government to the people of New Jersey? I don't know the exact number, but I think New Jersey ranks as one of the lowest states in terms of returns from our investment to the Federal government. We get something like 60 to 65 cents on the dollar that we give to Washington. So we're already on the lowest part of the spectrum there. That needs to change, right? If we composed 12 districts that are more competitive, but that could lead to a decrease or that could lead to senior members of our delegation losing elections and ending their careers, what that would mean for the people of New Jersey is potentially less resources coming in -- because seniority does mean power in the halls of Washington. And that's sort of a nonpartisan issue; whether you're a Democrat who has been to Washington for 20-plus years, or a Republican, that means on a nonpartisan level more resources and more aid for the people of New Jersey. That should be one of your main aims, I would argue.

So I'll give you an example about how you might apply this: Chris Smith, Congressman from New Jersey's 4th District. He's been in Washington for more than 30 years. Whether or not you agree with his

ideological partisan viewpoint, the fact remains that he's been there for 30-plus years, and that means something for resources that come to the communities in his district and for the state as a whole.

Now compare him, a Republican, to John Runyan. John Runyan's been there almost -- maybe nine months at this point. There is a difference -- he's also a Republican -- but there's a difference serving Washington for nine months versus serving Washington for 30 years. I think the argument could be made. And so seniority has to be a consideration when you figure out which district to cut.

There are six Democrats here, there are six Republicans here. One of the 13 members of our delegation will no longer have a job come 2013 -- that's going to happen. But I would argue that you should consider seniority of paramount importance in determining the districts and reshaping the districts. So that's the first thing I would consider.

The second thing I would ask you to consider is in terms of making the districts more compact in terms of communities of interest. I think that New Jersey's been ranked, overall, as having some of the most gerrymandered districts in America. I live in one of them; I live in Franklin Township, New Jersey -- five minutes from here -- in the 12th District represented by Rush Holt. There are eight municipalities that are cut into, including my own Franklin Township, several different times. So what does that mean? It means that people who live across the street from one another in the same town are represented by different people. And that presents problems for representative democracy.

The 6th District, represented by Frank Pallone, is one of the most gerrymandered in America. The list goes on and on and on.

So I think that, in terms of giving-- In terms of communities of interest, compactness in our districts is very, very important. If you could create some standard for making a cap on how many times one municipality could be cut into, that would be a good thing to consider. The fact that my hometown-- Ninety percent of my town, Franklin Township, is in the 12th District; 10 percent is in the 6th District; and the list goes on in other towns in New Jersey. That does not help representative democracy; it only divides people and makes it more ambiguous as to who they're represented by.

So in terms of making districts as compact as possible-- Obviously, it's one person, one vote; and in certain instances you're going to have to cut into towns -- but to limit it as much as possible. In an ideal world, if we could have counties -- whole counties -- in one district that would be ideal as well, but that's-- Because each district has to be the same, that's not possible. But to cut into districts as little as possible, I think, would be a very big importance for the people of New Jersey.

And then just the last thing I want to get into is the communities of interest. A lot of other states have criteria for what should constitute a community of interest, whether it's ethnicity, socioeconomic status, racial -- there are many different standards that can be applied. New Jersey doesn't explicitly say what those standards should be. Our Constitution-- There's nowhere where it says, "We should look at these standards." It's really up to the 13 of you to decide that. What I would recommend, as a citizen of New Jersey, is to come up with standards very early in the process; make it publicly available for the people of New Jersey to see what standards you are looking for when you're making these 12 new

districts. Is it in terms of, as I just said before, compactness with communities, which is important for being represented in Washington? Is it socioeconomic status within a certain group of people? But there should be some standards that should be applied consistently in all the 12 new districts. And I ask all 13 of you to make it very clear what those standards are for the people of New Jersey. I think it's-- And it should be fair, it should be equitable, and it should be done in a way that can adequately represent a group of people in the House of Representatives.

I just want to conclude by saying that if you could make the process -- this was said before-- I think the reason a lot of people are disenchanted with our government at this point in time is because it seems that everything is done in back, smoky rooms, right? That the process is rigged from the beginning and that they don't have an adequate say in their government. And if you could make this process as transparent and accountable as possible to the people of New Jersey, it will go a long way in restoring the trust that has been lost and eroded over the last several decades.

And the fact that this meeting was announced not that long ago -- and I should also mention it's a Tuesday at 3 o'clock. Now, I'm a student so I was able to come here. But behind me, it should be filled with more people, right? There should be more people at these meetings. It's not necessarily that they don't care about this process; it's just that they couldn't come -- it's 3 o'clock on a Tuesday and people have to work. So that's a problem.

But if you can do this for the process, from now going forth, until January -- make it as transparent as possible; create a website; say

what the standards that you're going to be using for communities of interest are; allow citizens of New Jersey to post maps of what they think should be done.

And I should also say that while this Commission of 13 people -- one independent, six Democrats, six Republicans -- I don't think this is the most ideal setup for redistricting. I think something that California has done recently -- having a Citizens Redistricting Commission, having a more direct democratic stance where citizens of California, through a lottery process, get to serve on the Commission -- that is something that, hopefully, New Jersey will have in the future. What we have now is better than having a State Legislature deciding it, but it still-- I just want to say for the record: I don't think that this is as ideal as it could be, in terms of having average New Jerseyans deciding their own districts, not political appointees to a Commission. I don't blame that on you, necessarily, but I think it is something that should be looked at for the future of New Jersey in terms of changing the process of redistricting. Just food for thought.

So for all those things, I hope you consider them in your process.

Thank you.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you, Mr. Israel.

Any questions? Yes.

MR. JASO: Where do you go to school?

MR. ISRAEL: Sure. So I-- I do not go to Rutgers, I go to Bard College -- a small liberal arts college in upstate New York -- but I'm a lifelong resident of New Jersey. I live in Franklin Park in Franklin Township. And I just happen to be down here for fall break and I wanted

to give my opinion on this while I was down here. But I am a lifelong resident of New Jersey.

MR. JASO: What members of Congress did you work for?

MR. ISRAEL: Sure, that's a good question.

I worked for Representative Rush Holt and Senator Bob Menendez. But as-- But even though I believe-- I have a certain political persuasion -- I'll let you decide what that might be. I think that--

MR. JASO: You said you were at Bard College, so-- (laughter)

MR. ISRAEL: Right, right.

Yes, but even though that is the case, everything I said is sort of nonpartisan in nature. I think that senior status as a member of Congress, whether you're Chris Smith or Frank Pallone -- it's senior status that gets financial resources to the State of New Jersey. And I hope that the 13 of you keep that in mind -- that as a collective body you should work to preserve the status of getting resources to New Jersey. And that just happens to be having many years in Washington, forming those connections with the power players in Washington. And that's a nonpartisan issue.

So even though I happen to be Democrat, I believe that that should be the consideration in mind. And also, in terms of compactness and communities of interest -- which should also be a nonpartisan issue.

MR. J. FARMER: Chairman Roberts.

MR. ROBERTS: Thanks.

Thank you very much for being here. I really found your testimony interesting. And it's to your credit that you're participating in this process.

And I think we're going to try very hard to have the process be as open as it can be. You heard references earlier to the website which will give people the opportunity to submit their own maps, to submit their own testimony. People who can't get here will have the opportunity to do that as well.

You know, referencing your comment about the time of day when you hold the hearings: I would just submit to you that there's really no perfect time. Ten years ago when they did this, I'm told that the first two hearings were at 7 o'clock in the evening. And at the first hearing, one person showed up to testify; at the second hearing two people showed up to testify. So we're already doing better than we did 10 years ago. But you're right; we can make the process better and we're going to try hard to do that.

Thank you.

MR. ISRAEL: Thank you.

MR. J. FARMER: Any other questions? (no response)

Thank you for your testimony.

I have no other witnesses on the agenda today. I would note that this is the third and final required public hearing. As Chairman Roberts noted, we have a long way to go, and we will be making some fundamental decisions about the openness of the process and how we're going to proceed in the future. So I would invite everybody to stay tuned on our website, and (indiscernible) all that public, we'll be as transparent as we can be. And I look forward to hearing from everybody in the public before this is done.

So do I have a motion to adjourn?

MR. FENTON: So moved.

MR. ROBERTS: Second.

MR. J. FARMER: All those in favor, signify by saying aye.
(affirmative responses)

We are adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)