

El Concilio de Fresno

NON-PROFIT CONSORTIUM

A UNITED EFFORT
FOR A STRONGER
COMMUNITY

Fresno, California 93744-4236



RECEIVED

JUL 1 1 2011

Per _____

June 27, 2011

California Citizens Redistricting Commission
1130 "K" Street, Suite 101
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Commissioners:

I, Venancio Gaona am writing this letter on behalf of El Concilio de Fresno, Inc. I had the privilege of orally testifying before you on April 15 and on June 23rd. Thank you.

On June 23, 2011 after testifying before the Commission's hearing in Fresno, I had the opportunity to hear many of the other speakers. There were four or five persons that at one point stated that the California Citizens Redistricting Commission should divide the City of Fresno along Highway 41 in a north-south line as reflected by the idea of "Tale of Two Cities." (I assume this comment is based on the status of the inhabitants as reflected and mentioned over the years by various Fresno politicians, notably former Mayor Alan Autry- "the north of Fresno is economically sound, the southern section is not.")

The following listed factors must be addressed by all City of Fresno officials and the corresponding elected officials and not by a further creation of a socio-political division or areas of self-interests (east versus west): These factors give cohesiveness and a community of interest to especially southeast and southwest Fresno. This area is a geographically connected population which shares common social economic interests. These "bond" the area.

1. Socio-Economic Factors, etc. Due to socio-economic, educational and political factors the city of Fresno is divided into "two cities." Fresno is composed of the northern and the southern portions. The line that separates them is one that runs east west across the city. The street that is the boundary of these two cities is physically Shields Avenue but is ever so slowly creeping north toward Shaw Avenue.

2. Splitting the City of Fresno east/west along Highway 41 so that there are two corridors; one on the west and one on the east, would further disenfranchise the largest Latino communities of interest in the city that contains a significant number of citizens, residents and voters who share a community of interests.

3. There are several socio-economic, educational, and political similarities across southeast, southwest Fresno and west of Highway 99 such as:

A. Educational Programs in Fresno Unified School District (FUSD): The FUSD in striving to achieve greater educational success with students in; attendance, reducing the drop-out rate, improving success with the large number of English learner students (20,662), of the approximate 75,000 students in the District, 85.7% of the students are minority, the large number of student expulsions, and the large number of students who are from low-come families.

- B. Bullard Pride:** Added to this number of educational endeavors to succeed in its educational mission by FUSD, there is the group of parents and residents self identified as "Bullard Pride" from the northwest area of Bullard High School organizing to secede from the District unless their needs are first met by the District. The dividing line along Highway 41 would strengthen the "Bullard Pride" position.
- C. Poverty and Unemployment:** The City has over ½ of the Fresno County population. It is part of the 18.2 % unemployment statistics of the County of Fresno.
- D. Changing Population Demographics:** The minority population continues to follow the exiting white and more affluent population that continues to move to the northwest and northeast of Fresno area, to neighboring Clovis and into southern Madera County.
- E. Professional Services and Health Care Accessibility:** All of these services are already in northern Fresno and to an extent out of the reach of the bulk of Latinos and other minorities.
- F. City of Fresno Services:** At the present time, citizens in southeast and southwest Fresno have to clamor for city services. **The proposed division along Highway 41 would only further provide an excuse for some areas, mainly in the southern portions to be served poorly if at all by the city staff and service departments.**

Conclusion:

There needs to be a consolidated endeavor by an area's constituents to seek redress through their elected officials who in turn must recognize the socio-economic, educational and political issues, concerns and aspirations of their voters. The issues call for a long-term effort with the citizenry recognizing that all people need to support the effort to solve their problems. The problems cannot be solved by creating artificial divisions where the constituents will spend their time trying or fighting as to who is more deserving of the city's attention.

Highway 41 as a dividing line within Fresno (north-south) is not a viable alternative. It is a physical barrier to uniting citizen voters with many community interests!

Cordially,


Venancio G. Gaona

