

Comments at the January 12, 2011 CRC Meeting

Peter Van Meter



Good morning. Congratulations on your appointment to the Citizens Redistricting Commission, one of the most important jobs ever for California. As an applicant that made it to the group of 314, I would like to share with you some thoughts I've had as a prospective Commission member.

1. Set Aside Your Personal Views

Those of you with activist backgrounds must resist pressure from your friends when they come calling for favors. The commission will lose credibility with the public if it is seen as special interests fighting it out, doing political "business as usual". The public will demand neutrality from you.

2. Hire a Neutral Staff

You must avoid bias in the selection and hiring of staff and consultants. You know how much influence can be wielded by these gatekeepers of information and preparers of reports. Avoid candidates with *any* history of working with advocacy groups. Be impeccably neutral in your hiring decisions.

3. Challenge Trainers for Bias

You must assess the credibility and relevancy of information provided by staff, consultants, and the public. You must challenge and question the training that you will shortly receive, to separate facts from opinion. Trainers are advocates and may press you to move beyond your legal obligations.

4. Start With a Blank Slate

When I attended briefing sessions for the Applicant Review Panel, a presenter stated that future commissioners should review party registration as a proxy for communities of interest. You

must prevent this from happening. The law is very clear: “Communities of interest shall not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.” Even *seeing* this data can introduce bias into your deliberations. Likewise, you should never see the current district boundaries, be exposed to the residency location of incumbents, or even who they are. Please, please start with a blank slate.

5. Consider the Terrain

Communities of interest must consider the effects of natural and man made features. Districts that leap across bays, like mine does at the Golden Gate, over mountains, and other features (even freeways) to join unrelated neighborhoods for political purposes must be a thing of the past. View the geography for yourselves, or at least use services like Google Earth.

I wish you the best of luck in this endeavor. The people of California are counting on you to do the right thing. I look forward to following your progress and the opportunity to see you again.