

November 21, 2010

An open letter to the first eight Redistricting Commissioners:

CONGRATULATIONS! You have the high honor and solemn duty of drawing legislative and congressional districts! You wouldn't have gotten this far in the process without impressive qualifications and experience.

You'll be getting lots of advice during your term, and I see from the initial meetings that you're getting it from real experts in your first two meetings. That is reassuring!

Nonetheless, I can't resist offering more advice. This is a process that I care about deeply.

Among the remaining six commissioners, be sure you **select a couple more experts with experience** in redistricting. You will need to hire technical experts, but you must also rely on experts among yourselves so you won't be snowed by hired "staff".

Be collegial. You're all qualified. Keep disagreements respectful. Take the high road. Don't give extra fodder to those who oppose the very notion of this Commission.

Expect, and ignore, personal attacks on your competence and integrity. You are have the honor and privilege of doing the State a great service – do your best! And while you're on the commission, conduct yourself publicly and privately as befits a person of integrity, such as a judge.

Operate openly – the State Auditor set a good model.

Conduct meetings around the state, but more importantly, **create a web site** identifying yourselves, **showing proposed plans** as soon as they are available, including your rationale behind various decisions, and **allowing for (moderated) public input**. This alone would be such a welcome change from the past!

Formulate TWO plans for the Assembly and TWO for Congress, and post those on your website. Reason: every plan has tradeoffs; citizens objecting to one aspect of one plan might realize that it is still a good plan, given that the other plan has other difficulties. You won't get "perfect" but you will get "fair".

Don't expect any "automated" map-making scheme to surpass your own good judgement. Create maps using common sense and of course the criteria specified in the law. **Use the "population polygon"** as a compactness measure for every district, and provide extra justification for any districts below 0.40 on that measure. A ratio that low might be warranted for various reasons, but "population polygon" does a good job of identifying which districts are not so compact.

Work hard and expeditiously – we're counting on you!

Regards,

Michael Fay