

**REPORT ON INFORMATION COLLECTED CONCERNING APPLICANT**

Under California Code of Regulations, title 2, section 60835, the Bureau of State Audits is responsible for collecting information concerning applicants for the Citizens Redistricting Commission that is needed by the Applicant Review Panel to perform its responsibilities. Pursuant to that regulation, Stephanie Ramirez-Ridgeway, Counsel for the Applicant Review Panel, requested information on behalf of the panel concerning an applicant being considered for selection to the Commission. This is a report by bureau staff in response to that request.

Name of Applicant: Maria Blanco

Date of request to collect information: August 2, 2010

Statement of request: \_\_\_\_\_

(1) On the supplemental application, in her first essay answer regarding why she is interested in serving on the Citizens Redistricting Commission and her fourth essay answer regarding relevant analytical skills, Applicant stated that she worked on California redistricting after the 2000 census. What was her role in the prior redistricting? For whom did she work? What did she do? What litigation was she involved in relating to the current legislative district maps? What position did she take in the litigation? What was the outcome of the litigation?

(2) On Applicant's Form 700, she listed a different address than the address she listed on her initial application. What is the explanation for this?

Response to request: \_\_\_\_\_

(1) In response to questioning by Bureau staff, Applicant clarified that she was involved in redistricting as Regional Counsel and National Senior Counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) at MALDEF's office in Sacramento. She was part of a redistricting team that met to review and discuss Hispanic representation in California voting districts. Applicant often met with different legislators to present them with proposed district maps that frequently would require modification of existing districts due to population growth. Applicant's major role was to ensure compliance with the Voting Rights Act and to preserve Hispanic communities of interest in the way district boundaries were redrawn.

Applicant wrote the reply brief in a redistricting case regarding the 28<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in the San Fernando Valley occupied by Democratic Congressman Howard Berman. In that case, MALDEF challenged the way the boundaries of the district had been drawn on grounds that the boundaries deliberately fragmented Latino voting strength by removing thousand of Latino voters to another district, thus diluting the Latino vote in violation of the Voting Rights Act. A three-judge panel of federal judges upheld the district boundaries because plaintiffs were unable to produce evidence that Latinos would not be able to elect minority candidates due to the hostility of non-minority voters.

(2) Applicant used her home address on the initial application and her business address on the Form 700. Using a business address is expressly permitting in the instructions for the Form 700.

Additional Information: In the "Activities" section of the supplemental application, Applicant stated that she volunteers on diverse community boards, including a board of directors for a community based legal group in the Mission District in San Francisco and works closely with organizations in the Asian and African-American community of the Bay Area and Los Angeles. Staff found Applicant to have served with the following organizations:

Board member, Poverty and Race Research Action Council - a civil rights policy organization whose primary mission is to help connect social scientists with advocates working on race and poverty issues and to promote a research-based advocacy strategy on issues of structural racial inequality.

Board member, Homeland Productions -- an independent, non-profit journalism cooperative whose mission is to illuminate complex issues through compelling radio broadcasts, articles, books, and educational forums, and to foster freedom of expression and creative risk through the media arts.

Board member, Public Policy Institute of California -- an independent, nonpartisan, non-profit research institution focusing on population issues, the economy, governance, and public finance.

Board member, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts -- an organization that presents contemporary art from the Bay Area and around the world to expand the boundaries of artistic practice and celebrate the diversity of human experience and expression.

Board member, Face Value -- an organization whose long-term strategy is to change public opinion about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people through new research, building coalitions, and ultimately launching a public education campaign.

Member, Obamanos -- a group of San Francisco Bay Area Latinos that organized to elect Barack Obama as President by fostering unity among Latino Democrats and working together on voter registration and education, fundraising, and other political organizing events.

Applicant has been quoted frequently in news articles and broadcast stories regarding legal developments having a connection to the Latino community such commentary supporting the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor to the United States Supreme Court, commentary disapproving the withdrawal of the nomination of Tom Saenz to become the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, commentary opposing the confirmation of Antonio Gonzales as Attorney General, commentary supporting the rights of undocumented students, and commentary regarding noncitizens having a voice in the democratic process.

Recommendations: None

Name and title of person submitting report: Steven Benito Russo, Chief of Investigations

Report date: August 9, 2010