



RE: Vincent Barabba – Letter of Recommendation for Redistricting Commission

Introduction

I am writing on behalf of Vincent Barabba and his application for membership in the California Citizens Redistricting Commission. I am the President and CEO of the State of the USA, a not-for-profit dedicated to helping the American people learn more about their changing society by providing a free public service web site with the highest quality measures and data. I am also a native Californian who grew up in and lived in both the North and the South of the state, with an extensive period of time in urban, rural and wilderness settings. My professional credentials include business leadership (as a consultant at McKinsey and Co. and a VP of Strategy at IBM), authorship, invention, and teaching on the subject of complex problem solving and leadership.

As a public servant, I spent more than 10 years at the Government Accountability Office (GAO), where I was first a Managing Director in charge of government wide Information technology issues for the US Congress and later Managing Director in charge of strategic issues. I am deeply familiar with very complex efforts requiring the oversight of the audit community and the need to meet standards of credibility, impartiality, and reliability with outstanding problem solving and communications abilities. I have known of Vince for more than a decade, and worked with him shoulder-to-shoulder for the last three years on an almost daily basis as we co-founded and launched a new public-service organization, giving me a deep familiarity with his professional capabilities, his personal history and character.

Qualifications

The Consummate Professional

Vince is a consummate professional, and as a result brings independence, an open mind, a deep skill base, analytical skills and an ability to appreciate and interact with very diverse people to everything he does. In our first professional encounter, years ago, Vince worked with me on an international workshop at the National Academy of Sciences to define the dimensions of data quality. With professionals from around the country and the world, I observed his extraordinary ability to call out an essential point, and to do so in a warm manner that would move the conversation forward. He has an extraordinary way of using his sense of humor and deferential delivery to engage on controversial and technical issues without getting lost either in the weeds, in red herrings, or in extremist points of view.

In his role as Chairman of a Board, I have watched him carefully balance constructive criticism with encouragement, efficiency in the management of an agenda along with a sensibility to know when it is time to stop watching the clock and focus on people. He has overseen technical issues on the audit committee, and worked with senior staff on a significant strategic planning project, which incorporated numerous complex decisions about the nature of a new organization, how it functions, how it is perceived and how it will evolve. Since the commission is a new body, Vince's experience with the life cycle of both new and longstanding institutions allows him to unerringly identify points of weakness or opportunity to build a stakeholder confidence institution.

The Problem Solver

Faced with a difficult and complex challenge, such as the one at hand, Vince is a true leader and problem solver. His open and creative mindset, capacity to develop relationships, ability to handle complex knowledge, set directions and navigate through ambiguous territory, design complete solutions, implement in a disciplined fashion, and make deliberate, considered decisions is at the highest level of people that I have worked with throughout my career.

In our work together, we have had to work closely to build deep relationships with the statistical and scientific community, consistently interact with the political process, understand our audience – the American people, and build a new institution that is especially capable of earning a new level of public trust. Because a state of the art web service is the major offering, a high level of technical proficiency has been required. Since this public web service is designed to help the American people make better choices with the highest quality statistical data – all while maintaining a strict impartiality in selecting and presenting information – the core of the commission’s challenge has been a daily part of my work with Vince. He has handled delicate legal and ethical issues in crafting principles upon which legislation would be based and made tactical choices about how those criteria are defended when political pressure is brought to bear.

One example stands out of how dedicated Vince is to making good decisions. He singlehandedly led an innovative new process, involving leading experts in the field of decision-making, to design a web-based tool to help people make better arguments with quality statistical data. His involvement combined a deep familiarity with best practices as well as the need to simplify and work through numerous case examples. I marveled at his capacity to handle the very scientific and the practical application of such ideas. Simply put, Vince is to impartial, rigorous decision-making and problem solving the equivalent of a world class physician working in a teaching hospital. He is constantly practicing his craft, learning and researching how to improve himself; and helping others learn the craft.

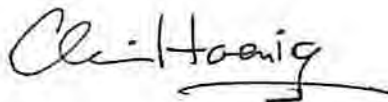
The Man of Wisdom, Integrity and Compassion

I have learned to my great pleasure over the years, that no matter how strong Vince is as a professional, a problem solver and a leader – his strongest suit is humanity, humor and humility. He is a man of wisdom, integrity and compassion. He has an unfailingly positive attitude about everything he does, while balancing it with a relentless pragmatism. Any whiff of a lack of fair play, or a lack of integrity, brings a swift and accurate response. He is the only man I have ever found that can quote poetry and tie it to statistics, decision-making, problem-solving, politics and the everyday lives of people. He is a loving husband and balances his life with a wife who is a painter, a daughter who is an educator, and a son who is a composer. In spite of his extraordinary accomplishments and many accolades, he unfailingly emphasizes the relationships with the people he has worked with.

Recommendation

Throughout all the 30 years of my professional career, I have never seen an instance like this one – where a new, powerful and crucial position has been created, accompanied by the availability of a man whose entire life seems to have prepared him for the duty at hand. I recommend Vince without reservation. The State of California would demonstrate an enormous early sign of success by selecting a man of his caliber and reputation to serve as an inaugural member.

Sincerely,



Christopher Hoenig
President and CEO