
Commission Meeting

of

NEW JERSEY REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

"Organizational Meeting"

LOCATION: Committee Room 11
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: September 6, 2011
1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMISSION PRESENT:

John J. Farmer Jr., Chair
Assemblyman Joseph Roberts Jr., Delegation Chair
Michael J. Baker, Delegation Vice Chair
Michael Duhaime, Delegation Chair
Assemblywoman Caroline Casagrande
Nilsa Cruz-Perez
Sherine El-Abd
Edward Farmer
Aubrey Fenton
Jeannine Frisby LaRue
Eric Jaso
M. Susan Sheppard
Philip Thigpen



ALSO PRESENT:

Frank J. Parisi
Office of Legislative Services
Commission Secretary

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

JOHN F. FARMER JR. (Chair): Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome. I want to call this first meeting of the New Jersey Redistricting Commission to order.

My name is John Farmer, and I have the honor of being selected as the 13th member of this Commission, the potential tie-breaking vote if they need it.

And today's meeting is simply for organizational purposes. This is not a meeting at which we'll be taking public testimony. We will, at the conclusion of this meeting, be announcing our schedule in terms of those public meetings. But today's purpose is simply to adopt our bylaws, appoint our secretaries, and to get our housekeeping in order.

So before I turn things over to our Co-Chairs, I did want to thank everybody on this Commission for their vote of confidence in naming me as the Chair and the 13th member. I hope you don't need my vote. (laughter) I hope that we're able to reach a consensus on a map that is fair and constitutional. But I'm certainly prepared to exercise the discretion that you've given me if I need to.

I think New Jersey is one of 13 states that tries to provide for fairness in this process. In most of the country, whatever party controls the state legislature sort of dictates the map, subject only to constitutional constraints. So I think there's a lot to be said for our system. I think there's a lot to be said for having an independent, 13th member -- and I am an Independent, politically -- as a tie-breaking vote. And I take that charge very seriously and will, as I say, exercise it if need be.

Having said that, I'd like to have Frank Parisi call the roll.

MR. PARISI: Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

Michael Baker.

MR. BAKER: Here.

MR. PARISI: Caroline Casagrande.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CASAGRANDE: Here.

MR. PARISI: Nilsa Cruz-Perez.

MS. CRUZ-PEREZ: Here.

MR. PARISI: Michael Duhaime.

MICHAEL DUHAIME (Delegation Chair): Here.

MR. PARISI: Sherine El-Abd.

MS. EL-ABD: Here.

MR. PARISI: Edward Farmer.

MR. E. FARMER: Here.

MR. PARISI: Aubrey Fenton.

MR. FENTON: Here.

MR. PARISI: Jeannine Frisby LaRue.

MS. FRISBY LaRUE: Yes, here.

MR. PARISI: Eric Jaso.

MR. JASO: Here.

It's pronounced Jaso. (indicating pronunciation)

MR. PARISI: Oh, I'm sorry.

Speaker Roberts.

JOSEPH ROBERTS JR. (Delegation Chair): Here.

MR. PARISI: Susan Sheppard.

MS. SHEPPARD: Here.

MR. PARISI: Phil Thigpen.

MR. THIGPEN: Present.

MR. PARISI: Chairman Farmer.

MR. J. FARMER: I should note for the record that as far as anyone can tell, I am not related to Ed Farmer. (laughter)

Seated to my left, ironically enough, is the Republican Chair, and that is Mike Duhaime. I'd ask Mike, now, at this time to introduce his delegation and make any comments.

MR. DUHAIME: Great. Thank you very much.

First, thank you Mr. Farmer for taking on this challenge as our 13th member. We really appreciate your willingness to do so in the leadership.

And I thank Speaker Roberts too, and his entire delegation, for, I think, so far working in a great spirit of bipartisanship. And I hope that will continue.

Just to introduce our members: First, Sherine El-Abd is a member who is no stranger to Republican politics around New Jersey, as somebody who is very active in Middlesex County and now in Passaic County. She also has been a family support coordinator, supplying Arabic language translators for the U.S. Military in Iraq, and has been very helpful and done a lot in terms of public service. Also, we have Cape May County Freeholder, Sue Sheppard, who is an attorney in Cape May County, also a former Councilwoman in Ocean City. We have Reverend Aubrey Fenton here, a former Burlington County Freeholder. Eric Jaso is a former Justice Department official and Federal prosecutor out of Morris County. And Assemblywoman Caroline Casagrande, the youngest female ever elected to the State Legislature, representing the great County of Monmouth. That's our Commission members; and yours truly, as well.

I think that as we go through this process, I think one place we can look for the spirit of bipartisanship we need, through this necessarily independent Commission that we have, is look to our own Governor and Legislature. They've worked, I think, well together to come together and find agreements on some big issues. And it's not always easy and it's not always pretty, but it happens. And they work together for what's best for the people of this state. And this is what this Commission is here to do.

We are looking-- And, obviously, losing a member of Congress, there will be necessarily tension, most likely, on both sides as we all look to do what is right and is fair. But I think the spirit that we've shown thus far in coming together and agreeing to the 13th member in a bipartisan way -- I feel very good about our ability to do this. And we're committed, on our side, to work for a very fair, very open, very bipartisan process as we go forward. It's very important to the state that we do so; it's important to our place in Washington, D.C., as a state; and it's important to every single citizen of this state.

So I think that we can, again, look to our leaders in the Governor's Office and the State Legislature as an example for how we can work together to make sure we achieve a result that's in everyone's best interest.

Thank you.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you.

Speaker Roberts.

MR. ROBERTS: Chairman, thank you very much.

Good afternoon to everybody.

It goes without saying it's a pleasure and a privilege for me to serve on this Commission. And I want to thank the folks who put us all here: Senate President Sweeney, Senate Minority Leader Kean, Assembly Speaker Oliver, Assembly Minority Leader DeCroce, Chairman Wisniewski -- who is with us today -- and Chairman Raia. I think they've put together a really first-rate Commission, present company excluded. And I really look forward to working together with everybody here.

The Democratic members: the Vice Chair, Michael J. Baker, who is a partner at the law firm of Hoagland, Longo; and past president of the New Brunswick Bar Association; former member of the New Jersey General Assembly in the early 1990s; and was most recently part of the legal team for the Democrats during legislative redistricting.

Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez: Nilsa, the first Latina in the history of the New Jersey Legislature; a veteran and former Sergeant of the United States Army; Vice Chair of the Democratic delegation for the New Jersey Legislative Apportionment Commission.

Ed Farmer: CEO and President of Millennium Strategies, former Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Passaic Community College, and for seven years served as Chief of Staff to Congressman Bill Pascrell.

Jeannine LaRue: Currently serving as Senior Vice President of the Kaufman Zita Group, after having served as Vice President of the Office of Public Affairs at Rutgers University; also former Governor Corzine's Deputy Chief of Staff; and a long-time Senior Vice President of Governmental Affairs for St. Barnabus Health Systems.

Phil Thigpen: Chairman of the Essex County Democratic Organization since 2001; former Essex County Freeholder, as well as a City

Councilman in East Orange; and a former national champion runner. Phil is a member of both the Seton Hall Prep Athletic Hall of Fame and the Seton Hall University Athletic Hall of Fame.

Phil, I don't know how good you are anymore, but that running skill might come in handy for all of us if this map doesn't go quite the way we expect it to go. (laughter)

And, Chairman, let me thank you for taking on this lovely and challenging headache of serving as the impartial 13th member. It's tough in New Jersey to find anyone who is Swiss-like in their neutrality, highly respect. It's terrific that you were a unanimous choice of this Commission. We'd all like to have elections where everybody votes for us, so you're off to a very, very good start.

I would just say, with respect to the Chairman, his work as Dean of the Rutgers-Newark School of Law, as Attorney General for the State of New Jersey, as counsel to the 11th member of the Legislative Apportionment Commission, gives Chairman Farmer substantive expertise on the issues that, together with his reputation as one of New Jersey's finest attorneys and fairest arbiters, will ensure that this process will be a great success.

I really look forward to working with my Republican colleagues as well, some of whom I've worked with in the past, some of whom I will be getting to know in the future. Highly regarded Chairman Mike Duhaime, who I've gotten to know a little bit and genuinely look forward to working together with you. I think it will be a great experience and look forward to it very much.

Let me thank the folks from OLS who have put this meeting together and will be doing a lot as we go forward -- Al Porroni, Frank Parisi, Raysa Martinez Kruger of OLS -- for all of their assistance.

Let me just, if I could, make a couple comments about the process as I see it. We begin with some good news. New Jersey's population grew over the past decade by about 4.5 percent, to 8.8 million people. And we are a more diverse state than we have ever been in our history. The bad news is we didn't grow quite fast enough. The United States grew by 9.7 percent over the past 10 years, as our country's population disproportionately shifted to the South and the West. The result is: We are one of 10 states losing at least one congressional seat. That includes our neighbors in Pennsylvania losing one seat and our neighbors in New York losing two seats.

But back to the good news: New Jersey is the only state in the nation losing a congressional seat that has a Congressional Redistricting Commission to decide what our new map will look like for the next decade. In fact, only eight states in the country have congressional redistricting commissions, according to NCLS, rather than arbitrarily placing map-making in the hands of whichever party controls the legislature. And that's something to be proud of. Although, frankly, if I were still Speaker of the General Assembly, I might have a different view. (laughter) But that was then, and this is now.

Some of the positives associated with the Commission: The presence of the independent member forces both sides to find -- try and find that allusive middle ground and to compromise. It protects against efforts to put political interests over the public's interest by focusing on

map-making on traditional redistricting criteria. It's not a perfect model, but it's certainly far superior to those that have turned map-making over to whatever party happens to be in power, and prevents -- or hopefully prevents the types of chicanery and shenanigans that we've seen in other jurisdictions.

It needs to be noted that the late, great, former congressman Bob Franks deserves a lot of credit for bringing this commission form of redistricting to New Jersey.

Just a couple thoughts about -- to echo the comments of Chairman Duhaime and Chairman Farmer in terms of where we go both procedurally and substantively. Procedurally, I think we'll build on the positive work of the Legislative Redistricting Commission to ensure that the process is as open as it can be, inclusive, and more deliberative than it was 10 years ago -- to underscore that commitment that public input is essential.

I hope that we'll have a congressional redistricting website that will allow citizen feedback, submission of citizen maps, and even software that will allow citizens of New Jersey the opportunity to engage in map-making. We should stay in constant contact with the reform community -- people like Ingrid Reed who are here today, and others who are truly committed to making this process meaningful.

And I'm happy that the Chairman, today, will begin talking about the public hearing process that will allow New Jerseyans, no matter where they live, to have something to say about this process.

Substantively, let's try to improve the current map in as many measurable ways as possible. We must recognize that deficiencies exist that

may be beyond the Commission's control. For instance, the fact that not a single female congressional representative since Marge Roukema's retirement almost a decade ago-- That's, frankly, a black eye on our state, and we must stay vigilant with our party leaders over the next decade to correct this.

But there are things that we can control. First and foremost, ensure compliance with one person, one vote. We must also, of course, ensure compliance with the Voting Rights Act. Let's strive to make the districts compact, preserve communities of interest, increase competitiveness, and ensure fairness. We should have a map that is responsive as well, a map that will allow the citizens and the voters to effectuate change when change is desired.

I think this is going to be a terrific process, and I and my colleagues are really very honored to be a part of it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. J. FARMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our first order of business today is the adoption of the bylaws. They've been provided to the members of the Commission and will be provided to the public. Do I hear a motion?

MR. ROBERTS: So moved, Mr. Chairman.

MR. J. FARMER: Is there a second?

MR. DUHAIME: Second.

MR. J. FARMER: Any discussion? (no response)

All those in--

Oh, Frank, do you want to call the roll?

MR. PARISI: Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

Michael Baker.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Caroline Casagrande.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CASAGRANDE: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Nilsa Cruz-Perez.

MS. CRUZ-PEREZ: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Michael Duhaime.

MR. DUHAIME: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Sherine El-Abd.

MS. EL-ABD: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Edward Farmer.

MR. E. FARMER: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Aubrey Fenton.

MR. FENTON: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Jeannine Frisby LaRue.

MS. FRISBY LaRUE: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Eric Jaso.

MR. JASO: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Speaker Roberts.

MR. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Susan Sheppard.

MS. SHEPPARD: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Phil Thigpen.

MR. THIGPEN: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Chairman Farmer.

MR. J. FARMER: Yes.

MR. PARISI: The motion carries unanimously.

MR. J. FARMER: The bylaws are hereby adopted.

The next order of business is the appointment of Secretary, which the bylaws provide will be members of OLS. But I think we need a formal motion to appoint Frank and Raysa as Secretary to the Commission.

Is there a motion?

MR. DUHAIME: So moved.

MR. ROBERTS: Second.

MR. J. FARMER: Frank, do you want to, in a self-interested way, call the roll. (laughter)

MR. PARISI: Certainly.

Michael Baker.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Caroline Casagrande.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CASAGRANDE: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Nilsa Cruz-Perez.

MS. CRUZ-PEREZ: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Michael Duhaime.

MR. DUHAIME: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Sherine El-Abd.

MS. EL-ABD: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Edward Farmer.

MR. E. FARMER: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Aubrey Fenton.

MR. FENTON: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Jeannine Frisby LaRue.

MS. FRISBY LaRUE: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Eric Jaso.

MR. JASO: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Speaker Roberts.

MR. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Susan Sheppard.

MS. SHEPPARD: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Phil Thigpen.

MR. THIGPEN: Yes.

MR. PARISI: Chairman Farmer.

MR. J. FARMER: Yes.

MR. PARISI: The motion carries unanimously.

MR. J. FARMER: As Speaker Roberts mentioned, we will be having a website, so we'll be receiving public input through that website, but also through at least three public hearings. Our first public hearing, where we'll be receiving public testimony, will be September 22, at a location to be determined -- probably in Camden, at Rutgers. And then we're also going to have hearings in New Brunswick and in Newark, also probably at Rutgers, although the dates of the latter two hearings are yet to be determined.

So we welcome public input. We'll have certain guidelines in terms of testimony that will be in place at the time of the hearings. But certainly anyone is welcome to submit testimony and/or maps of various kinds. And we'll also be announcing the specific site of our website when that's ready to -- in the next couple of days. Is that--

MR. PARISI: Actually, Mr. Chairman, it will be up. It's called *njredistrictingcommission.org*, and it's under construction currently and should be live very soon.

MR. J. FARMER: Terrific.

MS. EL-ABD: Could you repeat that name please, again?

MR. PARISI: Certainly. It's *njredistrictingcommission.org*. And as I said, you can go on it now. It will say *under construction*, and it should be up in a few days. It will have on it -- be similar to the website that was used for the Apportionment Commission. It will have a map of New Jersey, it will have information on the Commissioners, and it will also have information on the Commission, a copy of the bylaws, and a copy of the constitutional provisions. And it will allow members of the public to email the Commission and to make submissions as well.

MS. EL-ABD: Thank you.

MR. J. FARMER: Before I entertain a motion to adjourn, do I have anybody who would like to comment, or speak, or add anything to our very brief proceedings today? (no response)

Do I hear a motion to adjourn?

MR. ROBERTS: So moved.

MR. DUHAIME: Second.

MR. J. FARMER: All in favor, say aye. (affirmative responses)

(MEETING CONCLUDED)