
Public Hearing

before

NEW JERSEY REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

“Testimony from interested groups and members of the public regarding the establishment of Congressional districts for New Jersey for use during the 2000 decade”

LOCATION: Atlantic City Convention Hall
Room 302
Atlantic City, New Jersey

DATE: August 2, 2001
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMISSION PRESENT:

Alan Rosenthal, Chairman

Leonard Coleman
Dale Florio
George Gilmore
Elizabeth Randall

Karen Brown
James Dugan
Zulima Farber
Dana Redd
Frank Robinson



ALSO PRESENT:

Frank J. Parisi
Office of Legislative Services
Commission Secretary

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

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ALAN ROSENTHAL (Chairman): I'd like to call the second public hearing of the Congressional Redistricting Commission to order. Will the Secretary please take the roll? Will the Secretary put on his glasses to take the roll? (laughter)

MR. PARISI (Secretary): Okay. Karen Brown.

MS. BROWN: Present.

MR. PARISI: Len Coleman. (no response)

James Dugan.

Mr. DUGAN: Here.

MR. PARISI: Zulima Farber.

MS. FARBER: Here.

MR. PARISI: Dale Florio.

MR. FLORIO: Here.

MR. PARISI: George Gilmore.

MR. GILMORE: Here.

MR. PARISI: Lonnie Kaplan. (no response)

Lisa Randall.

MS. RANDALL: Here.

MR. PARISI: Dana Redd.

MS. REDD: Here.

MR. PARISI: Frank Robinson.

MR. ROBINSON: Here.

MR. PARISI: Candace Straight. (no response)

Gary Stuhltrager. (no response)

Chairman Rosenthal.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Here.

This is the second public hearing. The first public hearing was this past Tuesday in Trenton. There will be a third public hearing to take place in Newark, on August 9th. Advance notice has been given of these meetings. There have been advertisements in South Jersey newspapers, and there will be notices of the Newark meeting in northern Jersey newspapers.

We are seeking any input we may get from citizens, from groups, organizations, elected political officials, or whomever. So this is the opportunity for people to testify and present their ideas, their suggestions, their comments, with regard to the operations of the Redistricting Commission, or with regard to maps, or dividing up the congressional districts in New Jersey.

We have got two witnesses signed up to testify, and I'll ask Richard Lash to testify.

R I C H A R D L A S H: I'd like to thank you for holding these public meetings, and I don't envy you the task that you have taken on. I'd like to speak on a practice that began 20 years ago, I guess, that of, in some cases, splitting up town geographic boundaries in order to balance districts. I feel this is a disservice, regardless of which party you are affiliated with. It is a disservice to the political voting environment, because the basic get-out-the-vote unit is with the municipal committee of the various parties. If the municipal committee cannot speak for that entire district and unify the voters to one set of candidates, I feel that voter apathy develops, resulting in less votes coming out. That is contrary to the interests of the American political system. I urge you to do all possible to reinstate the city, town, village integrities once again.

That's my testimony.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Lash.

Are there any questions from any members of the Commission? (no response)

I think the message is clear. I don't think we need to question what you're interested in.

The second witness, who has signed up, is Douglas Browne.

DOUGLAS BROWNE: Thank you very much for this opportunity. I live here in Smithville, New Jersey. I began teaching social studies just this last year in Margate Tighe Middle School, and one of the things I've really wanted to do, since I used to work in the Legislature, was to bring some real life lessons to the students.

One of the primary lessons I gave to my sixth and seventh graders was to redesign the New Jersey legislative districts, using the current census. It was a great opportunity to learn them how to use spreadsheets and to understand political motivations and partisan motivations. I tried to impart to them the desires of both political parties and try to teach them about here's how you hurt the Democrats, here's how you hurt the Republicans. Some of the students were supposed to design Democratic maps. Others were supposed to design Republican maps. And so other students were supposed to design maps that would just, plain and simply, best suit the citizens without any design districts, as nonpartisanly as possible, and just make them as equal as possible regardless of political ramifications.

And as much as I tried to impart the partisan aspect of redistricting, even those that chose to design districts on either the Democratic -- on the part of the Democratic party or the Republican party, they all, regardless, designed

maps that were fair. I told them I was very disappointed in that, but-- But they all said, across the board, every single one of the students involved in this, was that any major changes really wasn't fair. Our bringing that forward to the congressional districting -- the eyes of children are much clearer than those of us adults many times. And what basically they said was that the districts, as they are, and especially when it comes to congressional districts, has been fair. It has served us well in that any major alterations will only raise major questions.

And so that's really the point I would like to share with you people is that the districts, especially down here in South Jersey, has served not just the people well, but the incumbents as well. So everyone is basically on the same page. Things are acceptable down here in South Jersey. And if things are altered too much-- One thing the children have learned is to trust the institutions, but question the motives of individuals. So I think that's a healthy way of understanding social studies. So I would just like to impart with you to keep it as simple as possible and don't make any major changes, because it will only raise questions and motivations.

MR. GILMORE: Mr. Browne, the Commission is willing to consider any maps that are submitted. And if you would like to submit that fair map that hurt the Democrats, I would be very interested. (laughter)

MR. BROWNE: Thank you very much.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Thank you very much.

Are there any questions or comments from members of the Commission? (no response)

Thank you.

I think that testimony is quite clear in what you're expressing, or what your class is expressing. Thank you very much.

Is there anyone else who would like to testify this evening? (no response)

Most of us are from central or northern New Jersey -- not all of us -- and we've come down here to listen. So we will--

MR. FLORIO: We have another person coming to testify.

MS. RANDALL: It looks like Commissioner Coleman.

MR. FLORIO: Oh, it's one of our Commissioners.

MR. ROSENTHAL: One of our Commissioners has just arrived.

MR. GILMORE: Let the record reflect.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Let the record reflect that he has missed the two witnesses. (laughter) But, I mean, he made a great effort.

MR. COLEMAN: (speaking from audience) I'm sure you'll be able to sum it up for us. (laughter)

MR. ROSENTHAL: I think he's flown in from California, then driven up on the Turnpike and the Parkway and the Atlantic City Expressway, and he made it.

But I thank you. We're going to sort of wait around for 15 minutes or so. We'll recess and wait around for 15 minutes and see if anybody else comes in order to testify. Then, if not, we will probably adjourn, because our purpose is to listen to peoples' ideas or to accept maps that they might want to submit, which may be submitted by mail or in any fashion or form. They will be made public, and they will be considered by the Commission.

Yes, sir.

MR. BROWNE: (speaking from audience) What would be the deadline for submitting maps?

MR. ROSENTHAL: We will get back to you on the deadline. We have not decided on a deadline yet.

MR. GILMORE: Mr. Chairman, if I could, I'd like to make a motion that, assuming that the majority of the commissioners would agree that we set a date of August 15th for submission of any maps or data that anyone in the public wishes to submit to the Commission.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Is there a second?

MS. BROWN: Second.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Any discussion?

MR. FLORIO: I think that we should have it a little looser than that. I think maybe for the balance of the month, probably until right up to Labor Day, but certainly longer than the 15th.

MR. GILMORE: The 20th, the 25th? I think the 25th would be about the longest period of time.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Do you want to change your motion?

MR. GILMORE: I'll change my motion, if the majority of commissioners would agree to the 25th, and that will give the Commission still time to review anything that is submitted.

MS. FARBER: And I'll second the revised motion.

MR. ROSENTHAL: That's second.

All those in favor, vote aye? (affirmative responses)

Opposed? (no response)

All right. The 25th is the deadline for submissions of maps to be considered by the Commission.

MR. DUGAN: Mr. Chairman, may I say something?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Yes.

MR. DUGAN: I'd just like to add my thanks to yours to Mr. Lash and Mr. Browne. It makes our jobs more meaningful when we see citizens come and give the intelligent comments and the obvious thought that you've put into your comments. It would be great if there were more people such as you that would come forward and share your thoughts with people who make decisions that effect the whole state. I want to add my personal thanks to you both for coming.

MR. GILMORE: Mr. Chairman, I would urge Mr. Browne to submit the map his -- the fair map that's fair to both sides -- that his students prepared, because it will be part of our record. And if your students worked that hard on preparing that map, they should be allowed to have it part of our record.

MR. ROSENTHAL: But do not promise that it will be promulgated by the Commission.

Any other comments? (no response)

Well, we'll stand in recess for about 15 minutes and see if anybody else shows up. Thank you.

(RECESS)

AFTER RECESS:

I take it there's no one else here to testify. We'll reconvene.

Do I hear a motion to adjourn?

MR. GILMORE: So moved.

MS. FARBER: Second.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Seconded.

All in favor, signify by saying aye? (affirmative responses)

Thank you. The ayes have it.

The meeting is adjourned.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, Harold White, Hearing Unit Coordinator for the Office of Legislative Services, certify that the foregoing is a complete and accurate transcript of the recording of the New Jersey Redistricting Commission Public Hearing, held in the City of Atlantic City, on the 2nd of August, 2001.

Harold M. White
(Certified Transcriber, AOC Certificate 509)

Office of Legislative Services
Coordinator,
Hearing Unit

Date: _____