

California Citizens Redistricting Commission PA State House Government Committee Hearing September 18, 2019

Commissioner Dai's Remarks

Good morning and thank you Chairmen Everett and Boyle for inviting us to testify. I'm Commissioner Cynthia Dai, one of 5 Democrats serving on the California CRC. I run a business strategy firm that serves Silicon Valley's tech startups.

The California Legislature used to draw electoral districts. But in 1991, Special Masters drew the lines because our Republican Governor vetoed the Democratic Legislature's plan. To avoid this in 2001, the Legislature agreed to a bipartisan incumbency protection plan. For \$20,000, a consultant would draw a safe district, virtually guaranteeing reelection. And it worked! In the 765 legislative and congressional contests over the next 10 years, only 5 seats changed hands.

This extreme gerrymandering sliced through cities, counties—even college campuses—to select voters and cut candidates out of districts with careful precision.

The most infamous districts garnered nicknames, such as the Stockton finger, the Low Tide district or the Ribbon of Shame.

With entrenched politicians held hostage to the extremes of their parties, state government was gridlocked. The Economist announced that CA was "ungovernable". We had the lowest bond rating in the nation; the Legislature could not pass a budget, or any other legislation, earning a record low approval rating of only 10%.

So in 2008, citizens revolted, passing the Voters First Act by initiative, giving an independent commission the mandate to draw fair legislative districts in collaboration with the public. It was proposed by a broad coalition of good government groups, civil rights organizations, business associations, and past governors, both Democrat and Republican who had been frustrated by unresponsive lawmakers.

In 2010, citizens rejected an initiative to abolish the new commission (sponsored by my representative, Nancy Pelosi, I'm ashamed to say) and instead passed the Voters First Act for Congress, adding Congressional districts to its purview.

The CRC is multi-partisan, with 5 members from the largest party, 5 from the 2nd largest, and 4 from neither, in recognition of the growing number of independent voters.

My colleague Commissioner Stan Forbes is one of those Independents, and he will explain how we drew the lines.



Commissioner Forbes' Remarks

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify concerning California's very successful redistricting reform ending partisan gerrymandering. I am Commissioner Stan Forbes, one of four Independents serving on the California CRC. I am a third generation California farmer and owner of the largest independent bookstore in our capital Sacramento for 33 years.

Drawing fair districts trusted by the public required four components. First, the Commissioners needed to be selected in a manner that avoided actual or even the appearance of conflicts of interest.

Second, a transparent process. Everything the Commission did was in public, live-streamed, transcribed, and translated into six languages. Private meetings discussing districts were not allowed. Input whether at the microphone or in writing was public.

Third, the Commission encouraged public participation in the process. 34 hearings were held at times and locations convenient to the public. At these hearings the Commission encouraged speakers to describe their communities. These comments proved invaluable in drawing districts that fairly represented the people. Each speaker received the same amount of time at the microphone whether ordinary citizen or a member of Congress.

The actual map drawing occurred in public where anyone could make comments and suggestions and see them considered. The mechanics of drawing was done by contracted line drawers under the Commission's direction. Because of California's ethnically diverse population, the Commission hired a Voting Rights Act attorney to insure that each district complied with the Voting Rights Act. The Commission resolved disagreements through discussion and a commitment to consensus, fairness and determination to make the process work.

Lastly, accountability. There are many ways to draw maps. The Commission was required to prepare a report which described how and why each district was drawn in compliance with the criteria set forth in the constitution.

Although the Commission could have approved maps with nine votes, 3 Democrats, 3 Republicans, and 3 Independents, in fact the process resulted in Legislative maps approved by a 13-1 vote and the Congressional map adopted by 12-2 vote.

The process was furthered by the Commission avoiding any appearance of partisanship by rotating the chair position each meeting.

Now I'd like to introduce my fellow Commissioner Peter Yao to talk about our results.



Commissioner Yao's Remarks

I am Peter Yao, a lifelong Republican. Before retiring from Raytheon, I was a design engineer and advanced to direct corporate R & D.

I served as Mayor and Council member of the City of Claremont, which is a suburb of Los Angeles. I was honored to be elected the first chair of the CRC.

Professionally, as an executive, I care most about end results. I believe the results of our commission are good:

The Commission's maps were more equitable than any drawn by politicians. Every map line was drawn in an open public forum in replacing the secret backroom process. The Center for Public Integrity singled out California's redistricting due to its unprecedented transparency, giving us a perfect score.

There were claims that the Democratic Party was able to unduly influence the CRC because the maps were perceived to favor Democrats. While both parties did send operatives to testify before the Commission, it is easy to confirm that their testimony did not impact the result. Instead, the changes reflected the unraveling of the bipartisan gerrymander that protected incumbents while ignoring demographic shifts over the past two decades.

Satisfying everyone was impossible. Predictably, the Commission faced legal challenges, but the California Supreme Court upheld all our maps in multiple, unanimous decisions and said the commission's work is an open, transparent and non-partisan redistricting process. By the way, 6 of 7 California Justices are Republican appointees.

Independent experts like the Public Policy Institute of California affirmed that our districts were more compact, better reflected our growing minority populations, and according to the Brennan Center, California has the most responsive district in the country.

In a statewide Field poll, voters approved our maps 2-to-1 and they rejected a referendum to overturn the maps.

Seven years after our maps became law; the California Legislature enjoys approval ratings close to 60%, passes budgets on time, and our bond rating is the highest in decades.

Independent redistricting really is the keystone of democracy and it embodies the words of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Thank you very much.

