

Redistricting speech 8/24/21 -v1

WORKING VERSION: I want to start by thanking all the commissioners for attending today, and for traveling throughout the state this week, despite COVID, to pack ten hearings into 5 days, when Article XI only required three hearings after sharing the proposed plan. 90% of life is showing up, and we appreciate it.

My name is Geoff Wise, I came to Ohio 22 years ago from the other UC – University of California, Berkeley, where I did an engineering PhD, to join Procter & Gamble as a research scientist. I first lived in John Boehner's hometown of Reading, and now in Wyoming, where our kids attend outstanding public schools. In the last year or so, I've gotten heavily into electoral reform, including writing a draft academic paper on how to improve the robustness of the US Electoral College with changes that both parties would sign onto. So, I love the idea of a bipartisan approach to making fair districts, it's challenging, but doable and I want to help however I can.

I think we can all agree that fair redistricting is challenging. Based on my expertise in the field of measuring partisan bias, I'll submit some written testimony on technical methods of evaluating maps against the reforms' criteria. Ohio State's Prof. Gunther, who's just getting back this week from vacation, will submit additional testimony later this week to guide you further, so it's clear if a proposed map falls within the new rules. I'm not going to get into any of that technical stuff here, but can I get a commitment that your staff will look at it, and get back to us with any questions?

Thank you. Some people think of redistricting like making sausage -- some of our current districts even look like sausage, squished into unnatural shapes like THIS or THIS that slice up communities and make them difficult to represent effectively. And like sausagemaking, it's often thought best if you don't see how it's done, just eat the sausage. But the 2011 sausage batch was SO bad, Ohio voters could not stomach it. In 2015 and 2018, over 70% of Ohio voters, Republicans and Democrats, the customers and owners of the sausage factory, decided *[trashcan]* we need to fundamentally change Ohio sausage making.

At my workplace, P&G, we solve some very challenging problems. You think sausage-making is messy, think about diapers and menstrual pads. Think about what you need to do show you've just made the world's best diaper. *[Don't worry, I don't have a visual aid for this one.]* Not just a pretty good diaper. Our consumers want the best diaper they can get. To solve that problem, you have to clearly articulate what the consumer really needs and define clear, measureable success criteria to drive to a winning prototype, then check that with the consumer until you get to the best. And you've got to embrace the problem, fall in love with solving it.

Ohio is the home of Bob Evans. We love sausage! There's still time to flip this from a burden to something fun that all of Ohio can jump into. We can turn mapmaking into a public contest, like Are You Smarter than a Legislator, with a leaderboard of the highest-scoring citizen maps vs. the one out of this committee, winner gets an all-expenses-paid Zoom meeting with the Ohio dignitary of your choice or maybe a box of sausage, autographed by this committee. Let's not dwell on which option they'd pick.

And we don't want to hear "It's too late for that." It's not, definitely for Congressional but even for the Statehouse redistricting. We can discuss that more in Q&A if you like. All we have to do is leverage the passion of those of us who have already fallen in love with this problem. It's going to make your jobs so much easier! I'd love to walk out of here today with a commitment to trying this crowdsourced approach with scorecarding. Let us help you serve Ohio with the best maps we can make.

Let me close my testimony with this: When you don't have an open process, people will suspect you're hiding something. Whether it's true or not, they'll believe you're trying to sneak in as much bias as possible. The Ohio Constitution you've pledged to uphold doesn't have any wiggle room for shenanigans.

We seem to be on a path where the commission makes a map but doesn't really show that it's fair. When we have a closed process to generate the map, without demonstrating its fairness, someone will run an analysis, based on well-established principles, to measure its fairness vs. maps that can easily be drawn with readily accessible technology. And then it's: "Here come the lawyers", a huge waste of time and Ohio taxpayer dollars. Can we please just not go there?

If the Constitution demands an unbiased map, why wouldn't you open up the process to help make the best one? Why are we still making sausage in the dark? I just don't get it. If you could address that today, I'd really appreciate it.

Co-chair Sykes, I contacted your office first, so I'll let you jump in first.