

MEMORANDUM

TO: OHIO REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

FROM: DENNIS TURNER

DATE: AUGUST 21, 2021

The Ohio Redistricting Commission has an historic opportunity to mitigate one of the biggest existential threats to our democracy – Gerrymandering. A citizen’s right to vote is effectively nullified when legislative districts are so manipulated that the election of incumbent candidates are virtually assured of reelection. The Commission can demonstrate to the rest of the country and to the world that Ohio is a leader in killing the Gerrymandering Zombie that rises from the dead every ten years. As an Ohioan whose ancestors came to Ohio in 1830, I hope when the Commission has finished its task that I can feel proud as an Ohioan that the Commission has created fair and balanced maps for Ohio legislative seats and for US Congressional seats.

As it happens, my concerns about the redistricting process and how it can be unfairly manipulated is shared by the members of a class I taught this winter (January to March 2021) for the University of Dayton Osher Lifelong Learning program (UDOLLI). The class was entitled “Creating a New Constitution for a Brand-New Country.”

I asked the class to imagine that the brand-new country for which they were drafting a new constitution was essentially a clone of the USA as it existed today. Thus, they were to assume that the new country’s geography, demographics, manufacturing, trade etc. were identical to the USA. They were also to imagine that the new country had no past governing experience and was never under the authority of colonial powers. It was stretch of the imagination, but I asked them to picture the country suddenly arising out of the sea, fully formed with a burgeoning population. I hoped to create an atmosphere and structure for the class which encouraged members of the class to approach their task of drafting a constitution *tabula rasa*, with a clean mental slate.

There were 70 students in the class. For the most part, they were white, ages from 55 to 85 years old, upper-middle class economically, well educated, and suburbanites. They took up their task of writing a constitution with enthusiasm and thoughtfulness. They more than met my expectation that by using their common sense, innate sense of fairness, seasoned by their fifty or more years of life-experience, they would be well equipped to draft a viable constitution.

Most of the discussion and decisions made by the class are not relevant to the Commission’s task. However, the class did spend considerable time debating the ten-year redistricting conundrum. In the end the class ultimately adopted a process for redistricting that they considered fair and balanced. Considering the recent Ohio Constitutional Amendments, however, the class’s specific solution to the redistricting issue is not possible in Ohio, but the proposed solution does reflect the fact that this group of Ohio citizens were adamant about the critical importance of creating fair and balanced legislative districts. The class was very much aware of the power and potential for abuse inherent in the process of drawing boundary lines for legislative districts. They understood that more requirements for the

creation of those districts were needed beyond specifying that the districts have approximately equal population. Otherwise, it was argued, there would be no restraint on political parties manipulating district boundaries to unfairly skew election results in their favor, i.e. Gerrymandering. Consequently, the class proposed the following process for drawing district lines:

1. District boundary lines would first be generated by a computer. (77% approval)
2. Mandatory guidelines for drawing district lines must be incorporated into the computer's program. (95% approval)
3. The mandatory guidelines should be nationwide and be drafted by a non-partisan committee. (90% approval)
4. The district boundaries created by the computer must be reviewed by a non-partisan committee that does not include any politicians. (95% approval)

My thanks to the Commission for taking on a challenging and politically sensitive task. I hope this memo and the fact that so many Ohio citizens, as represented by my UDOLLI class, want fair and balanced legislative districts that it will motivate members of the Commission to approach their work in an objective and non-partisan way.

Respectfully submitted,

Dennis Turner