



Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission

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MINUTES

May 9, 2012
1:00 p.m.

Roosevelt County Senior Center
Wolf Point, Montana

Please note: These minutes provide abbreviated information about committee discussion, public testimony, action taken, and other activities. To the left of each section in these minutes is a time designation indicating the approximate amount of time in hours, minutes, and seconds that has elapsed since the start of the meeting. This time designation may be used to locate the referenced discussion on the audio or video recording of this meeting.

Access to an electronic copy of these minutes and the audio or video recording is provided from the Legislative Branch home page at <http://leg.mt.gov>. On the left-side menu of the home page, select *Committees*, then *Interim*. Once on the page for *Interim Committees*, scroll down to the appropriate committee. The written minutes summary, along with the audio and video recordings, are listed by meeting date on the interim committee's web page. You must have Real Player to listen to the audio recording or to view the video.

Hard copies of the exhibits for this meeting are available upon request. Legislative Council policy requires a charge of 15 cents a page for copies of the document.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Pat Smith, Acting Presiding Officer
Jon Bennion
Joe Lamson

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED

Jim Regnier, Presiding Officer
Linda Vaughey

STAFF PRESENT

Rachel Weiss, Research Analyst
Joe Kolman, Research Analyst
Julianne Burkhardt, Attorney
Dawn Field, Secretary

AGENDA & VISITORS' LIST

Agenda, Attachment #1.
Visitors' list, Attachment #2.

CALL TO ORDER; ROLL CALL

00:00:07 Commissioner Smith called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. The Secretary took roll, Commissioners Regnier and Vaughey were excused (Attachment 3).

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

00:01:52 Commissioner Smith welcomed the public to the meeting and commissioner and staff introductions were made.

OVERVIEW OF ADOPTED DISTRICTING CRITERIA, HEARING PURPOSE, AND PUBLIC COMMENT GUIDELINES

00:02:25 Commissioner Smith reviewed the purpose of the hearing and the mandatory and discretionary criteria. He noted that the five proposed plans each have a particular emphasis but that all are a starting point and that many changes will be made as the districting and apportionment process goes on. Commissioner Smith also explained the meeting protocol and public comment guidelines.

PUBLIC COMMENT

00:08:03 **Gary MacDonald, Roosevelt County Commissioner**, thanked the Commission for coming to the eastern part of state to take public comment.

00:08:29 **John Jones, Mayor, Fort Peck**, said that Fort Peck is "caught in a rat tail" district and that Fort Peck shares many communities of interest with Glasgow. He said that Fort Peck would like to be in a district with Glasgow.

00:10:40 **Tammy Christensen, Sidney, candidate for HD 37**, discussed her concern about splitting Richland County into three districts. She said that Richland County meets the criteria to be left whole and that its citizens need a unified voice because of what is happening in their county.

00:11:42 **Floyd Hopstad, candidate for HD 35**, said that he supports the Communities Plan because it keeps communities together doesn't split Valley County into four house districts and doesn't split Glasgow.

00:12:39 **Bill Juve** asked if he could have copies of the proposed maps are available. Commissioner Lamson said that all of the proposed maps are available on the Commission's website and that staff also had paper copies.

00:14:10 **Sissy Anderson, speaking for Bill Whitehead, candidate for HD 31**, said that Mr. Whitehead could not attend the hearing but wanted to be on the record in support of the Communities Plan. She noted the Mr. Whitehead was one of the plaintiffs in the original districting lawsuit.

00:14:59 **Junior Hartsock** thanked the Commission for the opportunity to comment. He said that he supports the Communities Plan for the same reasons stated by Mr. Jones. He said that one district should not be sacrificed for another.

00:15:42 **David Halvorson, Richland Republican Central Committee, and candidate for HD 37**, submitted into the record a letter from the chairman of the Richland Republican Central Committee (EXHIBIT 1).

- 00:16:57 **Walter White Tail Feather, Director of Economic Development Office, Fort Peck and Assiniboine Tribes**, gave testimony on behalf of Fort Peck Tribal Chairman Floyd Azure. Mr. White Tail Feather read a letter into the record stating the Fort Peck Tribe's support of the Communities Plan. Chairman Azure's letter stated that the Communities Plan best protects minority voting rights and communities of interest in northeastern Montana. Other topics discussed in the letter included employment opportunities, the Fort Peck Community College, the relationships and political solidarity between the three area tribes, economic development issues, water rights, healthcare, and education.
- 00:23:05 **Charlie Malcom, Glasgow**, said that she supports the Communities Plan because it doesn't split Glasgow into two districts.
- 00:23:33 **Sen. John Brendan, SD 18**, said that he doesn't like any of the proposed plans. He said that he opposes the Communities Plan because it is politically biased towards the Democrats and that equality must be more of a priority. He discussed the district changes that have come about as a result of the 1972 Constitutional Convention and said that it is very difficult to effectively represent the very large districts. He said that as a result, rural voters have lost their voice. He urged the Commissioners to not let populated areas like Great Falls, Missoula, or Helena dominate the Legislature.
- 00:27:41 **Rep. Frank Smith, HD 31**, discussed reasons why he supports the Communities Plan. He said that he realizes that census results are why the voting districts have to be as large as they are.
- 00:29:13 **Stephanie Verhasselt, Clerk and Recorder, Richland County**, asked that Richland County be a single voting district. She said that she strongly opposes the Communities Plan because it would split Richland County into three districts. Ms. Verhasselt also submitted a letter into the record from June Backhaus, Sidney, stating her support for keeping Richland County whole (EXHIBIT 2).
- 00:30:31 **Loren Young, Richland County Commissioner**, said that because of all that is going on in Roosevelt County and because the numbers fall well within with the criteria, the best decision would be to keep Richland County in one district.
- 00:31:20 **Shane Gorder, Richland County Commissioner**, said that he agreed with the statements made by Ms. Verhasselt and Mr. Young for keeping Richland County whole.
- 00:31:46 **David Halvorsen** encouraged the Commission to do its best and that it has the citizens' best thoughts and wishes. He said that there is much to consider and whether right or wrong, there are those in the state with the perception that some parts of the state weren't treated fairly in the last districting cycle.
- 00:34:39 **Don Stepler, Richland County Commissioner**, discussed past legislative districts in the area and said that with every change, representation for Richland County was lost. He also discussed the population changes in Richland, Roosevelt, and Dawson Counties; and said that Roosevelt County needs to

stand as its own entity in order to represent itself and its needs. He said that the population explosion predicted for Sidney and the surrounding area should be planned for in order to ensure fair representation. Mr. Stepler said the Communities Plan would dilute the voice of the region and that population from other counties would dominate. He urged the Commission to make Richland County a stand-alone county for representation.

00:38:29 **Leslie Messer, Executive Director, Richland County Economic Development**, said that she definitely opposes the Communities Plan and that challenges in the area would become even more difficult to deal with if there are three or more voting jurisdictions added to the mix.

00:40:01 **Walter White Tail Feather, Poplar**, discussed accuracy concerns about the census numbers. He said that if the census numbers were more accurate, changes would have to be made to the proposed maps. Mr. White Tail Feather said that accurate numbers are essential to the process.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

00:42:16 Commissioner Smith thanked the public for coming and said that the Commission appreciated the comments.

00:42:34 Commissioner Bennion thanked everyone for coming out to comment in the middle of the day. He said that lots of public participation will increase the quality of a final plan and he urged everyone to ask their friends to study the maps and submit comment.

00:43:20 Commissioner Lamson thanked all for their comments. He discussed the ongoing trend of population loss in eastern Montana and the ripple effect it has on the rest of the state. He said that four proposed plans keep Roosevelt County whole and all five proposed plans give Roosevelt County at least one representative and that any representative elected will be very cognizant of the growth and issues facing the area. He also encouraged continued public comment.

00:45:52 Commissioner Smith emphasized that the public comment period will remain open through early 2013 but that the Commission will begin its deliberations in August. He asked the public to encourage their friends and neighbors to participate by submitting comment.

ADJOURN

00:46:31 With no further business before the Districting and Apportionment Commission, Acting Chair Smith adjourned the meeting. The Commission will meet next on May 15, 2012, in Crow Agency, Montana.

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