

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Before

The Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission

By

Senator Jim Peterson, SD #15

April 12, 2012 at Lewiston, Montana

Members of the Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission, thank you for the opportunity to present public testimony. My Senate District #15 is the largest and one the most rural legislative district in Montana. It encompasses all or parts of six counties, Choteau, Judith Basin, Fergus, Petroleum, Garfield and McCone, and is larger than ten U.S. States. Senate District #15 average population is one person per square mile with Lewistown included. Of 435 school districts in Montana, all or parts of just over 100 are in my Senate District.

My main message to you as you consider redistricting is to not make rural areas irrelevant when combining rural areas and urban areas into one legislative district. Rural areas are already losing out when you look at Montana. Of the 50 Senate Districts, only eight are east of a North-South line between Malta, Lewistown and Hardin. In addition rural community interests are many times different than urban interests and each should have as balanced representation as possible in a rural state like Montana.

It is very easy to combine rural and urban areas and because of the population centers and make the rural areas irrelevant because the urban vote will decide every election. Please be careful here and not let just raw politics dictate the outcome. Please consider the non-partisan legislative staff suggestions in your deliberations.

The rural-urban divide is already wide enough and whenever possible, please considers giving the rural areas a voice for their community interests and not just combine them, without very careful consideration, with an urban area that adds insult to an already very sensitive area. Don't misunderstand me, rural and urban communities need each other, but they have different community interests and needs. Redistricting should take this into account as much as possible.

Please take off your political hat, as hard as it is to do, and do the right thing for the right reasons. Please don't gerrymander this process at the expense of community interests that need representation in the legislature.

In closing, let me give you this example. I live in the country, many of you live in the city. You have everything I need, but I have numerous things many of you want. Sporting goods supplies versus hunting...movies versus hiking, fishing and an evening camp fire...machinery parts versus a good old chuck wagon barbeque or cattle drive. Please give our community interests, especially rural areas, some special consideration. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Senator Jim Peterson, SD 15