

Dear Members of the Independent Redistricting Commission:

I look forward to attending your next meeting on June 7, 2013.

I wish to reemphasize a point that I made in my previous letter. It is important for this commission to move as quickly as possible to hire its own staff. I respect Ms. Gutierrez for all the assistance she has provided to the Applicant Review Panel. Ms. Romero is a former student of mine from the University of Texas Law School and remains a source of pride to me. Syd Falk is a former law partner. He is a very knowledgeable and skilled lawyer and my personal friend. However all of these three fine persons are, and hope to remain, employees or consultants for the City of Austin; not for this commission. They are merely assigned to help this commission as a part of their duties for the city. As a result, they operate in a perpetual conflict of interest. This commission has no effective control over the timing or quality of their work or over the confidentiality of commission affairs or communications. I realize that selecting a staff that is knowledgeable, experienced and has the integrity essential to the success of this commission is important and may take time. Nevertheless, it is important that this commission become truly independent as soon as possible by choosing and hiring a staff that is its own. Proposition 3 prohibits hiring city employees or the controlling person of a firm consulting for the city.

It amazes me that there remain many persons, including some in local leadership positions, who continue to insist that this citizen commission will “crash and burn.” Some observers are skeptical that you can timely produce a fairly drawn plan for 10 single-member districts. Instead, they expect that the holding of the 2014 elections will be jeopardized by a deadlocked commission and that the final redistricting map will be drawn by a state or federal court (i.e. the experience of the Texas Legislature). Many of these skeptics apparently feel that only elected politicians and their close supporters can properly draw election districts. The voters of Austin disagreed by approving Proposition 3. Now the responsibility and the trust of all residents of our city fall on you. I am confident that you are up to the task.

Your task, however, will be difficult. It will be impossible to fully satisfy everyone who testifies before you. There probably will be many times when you are in consensus on what to do; but also many times when you disagree. The final redistricting plan must receive the affirmative vote of nine members of the commission. Mutual trust among the members of the commission is essential. The camaraderie among the commissioners of the California commission was a key to its success. I renew my suggestion that it would be good to rotate the chairmanship of the commission, thus reducing one potential point of internal friction.

Good luck. Stay well.

Sincerely,

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