

November 17, 2013

Chair and Members
Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

via email to icrc-craig.toungel@austintexas.gov

Subject: “Packing” of non-racial/ethnic minority voting interests in Austin

Madame Chair and Commissioners,

Please accept my heartfelt thanks for the tremendous effort each of you has put forth on behalf of our city. But before you conclude your work, I must call your attention to the elephant in the room.

Four of 10 Austin voters are right-leaning (40%). Right-leaning voters residing east of Mopac are dispersed among a strong left majority in nearly every precinct. However, right-leaning suburban voters are a majority in many precincts west of Mopac and in the mostly-suburban portion of the city west of Mopac cumulatively.

Three right-leaning districts (6, 8, and 10) can and should be drawn west of Mopac.

At last night’s commission meeting the self-identified Travis County Democratic Party Chair and at least three Travis County Democratic Party precinct chairs, each residing in right-leaning, suburban precincts west of Mopac (220, 231, and 237), heaped praise on the commission for the present configuration of District 10.

The reason they are so happy is because the commission “cracked” its original, suburban and right-leaning District 10 to be left-leaning by removing far-west suburbs and replacing them with central-city neighborhoods east of Mopac.

Speakers from heavily left-leaning precincts 273 and 214 in central Austin east of Mopac—also happy and saying so last night—have been granted a triple bonus from the commission by being placed together, not having to share power with their left-leaning D9 or D7 neighbors across the street (literally), and themselves further turning D10 into a left-leaning district that they can now control. This is an example of the pie-slice effect opposed by many—and rightly so.

Because it is not one of the stated criteria in the amended charter language, public commenters have twisted themselves into knots to influence the political left-right makeup of districts without overtly stating this goal. Euphemisms abound—neighborhood integrity, planning area boundaries, home type/age/size, compact district coalitions, school district boundaries, transportation corridors, deer problems, fire hazards, parks, creeks, greenbelts...

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What is in the charter is this:

Article II, Section 3. Redistricting.

(F)The place of residence of any incumbent or potential political candidate shall not be considered in the creation of a plan or any district. Districts shall not be drawn for the purpose of favoring or discriminating against any incumbent, political candidate, or political group. [emphasis added]

However, changes made by the commission from November 2-6, 2013 had the clear effect of “packing” suburban voters into a notably less-compact District 6 extending from Bee Cave to Round Rock and importing heavily left-leaning central-Austin precincts into suburban District 10.

This situation is easily resolved with minor tweaks to the commission’s latest map that will leave seven districts unchanged.

The boundaries of Districts 10, 6, and 7 can be rotated clockwise to restore the integrity of a right-leaning District 10. This shift would return precincts 273 and 214 (still remaining together as is their wish) to their cohorts in very left-leaning District 7; return a group of far west and right-leaning Travis County precincts possibly including 232, 234, 245, and 343 along FM2222 to District 10, restore District 6 (now extending from Bee Cave to Round Rock) to its previously-proposed (September 28), compact and right-leaning configuration, and return west-of-Mopac precincts 207, 259, and 263 to District 6.

I strongly urge you to give this balanced remedy your thoughtful consideration before concluding your historic work.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Edwards, Chair
Travis County Republican Party