

September 20, 2021

VOTE EXPLANATION

—Senator Jeff Golden
Oregon Senate District 3

To meet the Senate's duty under the state constitution (Article IV, Section 6), today I cast AYE votes to create two new political maps for the state of Oregon: SB 881 for congressional districts and SB 882 for state house and senate districts. In my view they were well-informed by citizen input and met the criteria designated by law for this process.

This was not an easy vote to cast. These are not decisions that should be made by Oregon's legislators. They unquestionably impact the future prospects of any of us who choose to run for re-election or any other legislative office, as well as those of our close political colleagues. That means, however much care and integrity we bring to the task, we have a conflict of interest that pertains to almost no other Oregonians. That's a simple fact. To quote an increasingly popular slogan, "Voters should choose their representatives, not the other way around."

It's fair to ask if and how much our personal political interests influence our thinking in this process. But that question is neither resolvable nor as relevant as it might seem. Even if we could bring ourselves (as very few people can) to fully ignore personal interests, the current process is one reason many Oregonians understandably believe "the system is rigged." If there were any doubt before, the increasing civic strife over management of the COVID crisis makes painfully clear the high price of citizen disillusionment with government. Every decision we make these days has to consider the resulting impact on civic trust, and drawing the maps by which we ourselves might run for office clearly moves us in the wrong direction.

There's no reason we should keep paying this price. We legislators have no unique competence for drawing these maps, and no resources that couldn't be made available to a panel of designated map-makers who are not members of the legislature. Eight states have elected to do just that for congressional districts, and fourteen for state legislative districts. All of them seem to be operating well, and there's no indication that any of them want to re-establish the conflict of interest that we still accept in Oregon.

It is time to join these states. I call on my colleagues to transfer the responsibility we just fulfilled to an independent redistricting commission. Recent events suggest that Oregonians are ready to do that themselves by way of a ballot initiative that would have a very good chance of passing. But how much better for the long-term project of restoring public trust if we made this change ourselves.

Whatever the path, let's get out of the business of drawing maps that affect our own political fortunes.