

Dear Members of the Commission, thank you for allowing me to testify today here in Mansfield.

What happened to my Ohio? When did the common threads that bound us together split apart? Where are its leaders? Why can't Ohioans demand more? How do we unite in truth going forward?

These are deliberately subjective questions which would require hours, if not days, to answer in an as objective and responsible manner as possible; but which are very much on the minds of all Ohioans in one form or another these days due to the long list of catastrophic events occurring in just the past decade plus, including the Crash of '08 right up to the pinnacle of corporate and government colluding corruption, called HB6, and of course the Pandemic.

It has now been exposed to all the total disconnect occurring between our elected representatives in large parts of the state and the electorate with HB6 as the leading example of laws that are passed without any effective and honest communication between elected officials and their constituents. The redistricting that occurred after the 2010 Census simply allowed lawmakers to pay little heed to constituents, particularly those codified into the minority. This is what Gerrymandering has wrought.

The Ohio I remember coming back to prior to the new Millennium, a mere twenty plus years ago, was still a state considered by many to be the Bellwether of the Country. To voters; ideas, leadership and a real commitment to public service mattered more than partisanship. Ohioans historically are a mixed bag filled with various peoples and cultures capable of producing high achievements in athleticism, art, education, exploration, industry, science and even politics. Amongst those achievements began the weaving of numerous threads that bound Ohioans together with a solid work ethic, sense of civic pride and a will to accomplish more. Common and widely shared values such as these made any city-bred, suburb-born or rural-raised Ohioan right at home anywhere in Ohio.

And those same values were expressed by Ohioans in their public demands for fair political districts in 2015 and 2018, which brings us here today. Ohioans have rightly recognized that the skewed sketches so wrongly done after 2010 have warped our body politic out of the balance we used to enjoy so prominently on national stage. Gerrymandering has allowed demonization of political affiliation to fester and spread across Ohio like an inoperable tumor. Ohio has become unrecognizable in the face of so many emotional torments pitting its inhabitants against each other to the point we no longer regard each other as friends and we no longer trust ourselves.

In the midst of all that has happened, leaders stopped leading because they could afford to, thanks to Gerrymandering; and when they stopped leading, they stopped listening except to their paymasters, upon whom political ideology is meaningless. Federal and state legislators in our part of Northwest and North Central Ohio rarely hold public meetings, and when they do, they are typically announced a few days in advance on social media with very limited hours, and that's if in rural Ohio, you have internet service available. Otherwise, the local print media, limited in scope and resources, delivers scant information on important statewide issues to rural communities.

In order for the political process in Ohio to overcome years of deception, and in some cases dereliction, that has led Ohioans to distrust their own, Ohioans will need to demand much more of their leadership at this time of redistricting. That's because even after the new lines are drawn the old, misinformed beliefs still remain that Gerrymandering helped foster. You can't redraw bigotry, ignorance, prejudice

and racism out of existence. They're going to be there but they could be better addressed this time if Ohio's leaders make it so.

Ohio could move dramatically forward in its elections by not only adopting new, fairer districts reflecting a more balanced political viewpoint amongst each localities' populace but by enhancing the political communication and discussion between candidates, elected leaders, their constituents and voters in general.

Here are a few ideas:

1. Hold public officials accountable by having them hold a set number of public meetings per quarter that are advertised weeks in advance. Public officials are used to filing mandatory public finance documents; this would be another mandatory requirement for public office, which is part-time by the way even though ironically their decisions affect the lives of us all, full time.
2. Level the playing field among political opponents during campaigns as much as possible by allowing candidates from independent parties that are legitimately organized or even non-partisan independents to have the same filing requirements as the Democratic and Republican parties' candidates. By lowering the threshold for independent candidates to run for office you are encouraging future leaders to help shape new discussions among the voting population, that in turn informs incumbents to be more open, refined and responsive in their own campaigns.
3. Re-energize the Ohio electorate in connection with adopting new districts by changing Ohio's Closed primary system to an Open primary by which independents can participate in that election. Giving independents, who constitute the majority of Ohioans, an added voice will help our leaders formulate their policies and views more closely adhering to their constituents' desires.

We hold forth that every Vote count but we do not do so for every Voice and when numerous Voices are silenced then the Voters are hearing less than the whole Truth. Gerrymandering reduced our capacity for free will by limiting our choices, so to counter it quickly it would be prudent to add more voices and help unite Ohioans in their quest for Truth.

The idea that Conservatism and Liberalism cannot coincide is absurd, they are not mutually exclusive and this need not be a zero-sum game. Liberalism means freedom and while our notion of it may succumb to the whims of time, its core remains the same; I can choose. Conservatism is not incompatible as it holds that decision-making devolve down to the lowest conceivable entity, that is the individual and to the local community when affecting a populace; It's their freedom to choose. However, our ability to choose, and choose wisely, has been severely limited by Gerrymandering, lack of public access to elected officials and the outright public corruption affecting large swaths of voters.

Members of the Commission, the task at hand is to restore the flower of our democracy whose fragrance, long dissipated, once promised hope and whose former luster inspired dreams for many; but now in all its faded glory it reeks of cynicism and despair with only lust remaining for the privileged few.

Let's do it right this time Commission, and bring the people back as well. Thank you.