

TESTIMONY OF
CONGRESSMAN AL SWIFT
before the
Washington State Temporary Redistricting Commission
Saturday, February 26, 1983
Seattle, Washington

The Second Congressional District has a distinctive character. It always has. Trees and fish, farms and small communities, ports with special problems and different needs from the large ports of the West Coast---these are the qualities that have characterized the Northwest corner of Washington State.

Those qualities are not unique to the Second, but the combination of them is. A Congressional office has limited resources. Its effectiveness is improved or diminished in direct relation to the similarity or dissimilarity of issues confronting the various parts of the area which it serves. Therefore, Congressional districts should ideally be tailored to combine communities with similar interests.

The last redistricting effort paid too little attention to the importance of retaining wherever possible this community of interest. It ignored its importance to both the people being served and to the ability of the Congressional office to serve at a maximum level of effectiveness.

No one should be surprised to learn that there were some partisan considerations that were involved in the decisions the legislature made last year. Neither political party has a particularly proud history of practicing restraint in redistricting when they have the votes. So the fact that some Congressional district boundaries were drawn for very specific political purposes connected with certain candidates in the last election is not too astonishing.

But it is a different ball game now and since this Legislature demonstrated what I think is considerable wisdom in establishing this Commission, there is a clear opportunity to deal more appropriately with the people who were unfairly affected by boundaries that were drawn in that more partisan atmosphere. Many examples of violations of community of interest exist along the southern border of the Second Congressional District. Everett is, unfortunately, not the only example. While Everett's concern is relatively well known, it is, unfortunately, not the only problem. There are other problems along the boundary line that the Commission may well want to examine. For example, in removing Everett, the last Legislature had to find some other people to put back into the Second District.

The North Kitsap Peninsula---so clearly and closely tied to the unique concerns of that county and of the city of Bremerton---was picked. In sharp contrast to the matters of concern to the rest of the Second District, this area has little direct concern with trees or fish or those types of issues, but is deeply concerned with matters relating to the Defense Department, federal employment matters, contracting out and the impact of revenue loss resulting from an awesome federal presence. These are the issues that the Congressman from Bremerton deals with regularly and has already organized his office to address.

I have been told by prominent officials of the area, “Don’t take this personally, Al, but we’d like North Kitsap back in the 6th district where it belongs.”

It’s hard to argue with that logic.

A sliver of Mason County has been removed from the rest of the county for no apparent reason.

And the splitting of the Siamese twin cities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam is amazing. Everyone knows why it was done, but I have never heard anyone even try to justify it.

These four instances are each examples of how the people to be served have been mistreated under the plan the Court threw out. You have an excellent opportunity to right these wrongs.

I would suggest that these meaningful changes need make little difference in the relative numbers of Republicans and Democrats in any of the Congressional Districts. For example, the retention of Aberdeen in the third district by the last Legislature had more to do with where a potential candidate lived than what the partisan make-up of the area was.

Let me touch on one more point. An important purpose of this exercise can be to improve the delivery of good representation. The people will make known at the polls they are satisfied with the amount, style, and type of representation any given elected official provides. But in drawing boundaries, one can seriously affect, for good or ill, how well any person can represent a District.

I have worked hard to serve the new Second District in the best possible way, and have drawn some conclusions that seem to me to be inevitable. For example, after you have studied all the transportation routes, determined the most efficient ways to get from one place to the other and overcome the physical problems of your district being bisected by Puget Sound on a north-south axis and the western half of that being bisected by the Olympic National Park on a west-east axis, you’ll inevitably conclude that the functional center of the Second District is Everett, whether it’s in or out of the district.

The transportation links lead out from Seattle, Edmonds and Mukilteo and that fact moves the functional center of gravity of the district more toward Everett than it was in the older incarnation of the district when you simply traveled up and down Interstate 5.

It shall also be noted that the Second District still contains the largest single piece of Snohomish County. And, further, Snohomish County—even without Everett—still has the largest single population of any County in the District. So a Congressional presence there is essential. Moreover, Snohomish County can be served much more efficiently from Everett than from Seattle. The examples of the impracticality of the present plan go on and on.

Let me conclude this way. These issues I’ve raised have much to do with organizing the state so that whoever the people elect will have the best chance to represent them effectively. Who is well served by creating unnecessary stumbling blocks to good constituent service?

Is there time for you to deal with these concerns? Of course. What makes redistricting so time consuming for a legislative body are the layers of political interests that must be served. You don't have that problem. There are plans already prepared that meet the Court requirements and deal fairly with the people—in Everett and elsewhere. There is also time to prepare your own.

I thank you for the opportunity to present these thoughts to you. While I don't envy you your task—it can be very rewarding to design a fundamental blueprint for how Washington citizens will be represented for a decade and be able to do it away from the most intense of partisan pressures.

I wish you well.

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