



Stephanie Verhasselt <sverhasselt@richland.org>

redistricting

1 message

Don Steppler <dsteppler@richland.org>

Tue, May 15, 2012 at 11:17 PM

To: Stephanie Verhasselt <sverhasselt@richland.org>, Shane Gorder <gorder@middrivers.com>, Shane Gorder <sgorder@richland.org>, Loren Young <lyoung@richland.org>

To Whom it may concern;

My name is Don Steppler, and I am one of the Richland County Commissioners. Because of prior commitments I am unable to attend today's proceedings, so I am writing this letter to voice my opinion on the subject of the new boundaries for Legislative Districts.

The only plans that have been proposed, that make the most sense for Richland County and its residents, are the plans that leave the County as a single entity, using its borders as its boundaries. I have been involved with the Redistricting Hearings for the last 30 years. In the 1980's, Richland County had Two Representatives. The first had the City of Sidney as its boundaries, the second was the remainder of Richland County and the Eastern half of Roosevelt County from Brockton east to the North Dakota Border. These two Districts were combined to form a Senate District. In 1988, I was the Representative elected to hold this position.

In the 1990's, the Districts boundaries were re-arranged and Richland County had one Representative for the Sidney, Fairview, Savage and Lambert area's, and the rest of Richland County was combined with McCone County. These two Districts were combined to make up the Senate District.

In 2000, the boundaries were again changed to create a Representative District including Sidney, Fairview, Savage and Lambert, with the remainder of the County combined with Eastern and Northern Roosevelt, Sheridan and Daniels Counties. These Districts were combined to form a Senate District.

As you can see, Richland County has been bounced around when these Districts have been created. We are now beginning to regain our population, and at present we meet all of the criteria to again create a Representative District using the borders of Richland County as the boundary lines. Since there are major areas of growth projected to happen in this County, and because of all of the unique opportunities that continue to make Richland County the bright spot for job creation in the State and the Nation, as the result of the Energy Industry and the supporting businesses, it makes complete sense to leave Richland County as its own District, with a Representative who will be able to voice the needs of this County as a single entity.

As the only Democrat elected to the Richland County Commission, I received a phone call asking me to support the plan that divides Richland County into three Districts, with the idea that it would give the County more of a voice in the Montana Legislature. I disagree with this premise, as I believe it would dilute our voice and make it more of a challenge to represent Richland County with a united voice.

Thank-you for listening to my opinions and please take these concerns into consideration when making your decision.

Sincerely;

Don Steppler
15243 County Road 321
Brockton, MT 59213



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Superintendent

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District Clerk

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May 15, 2012

Districting and Apportionment Commission
Legislative Services Division
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear Commissioners:

The task of redistricting congressional districts is certainly not an enviable charge and I will thank you in advance for your work on behalf of each Montanan.

As the superintendent of Sidney Public Schools, I serve a school system comprised of an elementary and high school simply because the district does not have contiguous boundaries and have experienced the challenges and complications associated with this absence of contiguous boundaries. In review of the five (5) redistricting plans presented for public input, the Communities Plan splits Richland County into three districts and appears to do the same for the community of Sidney. This proposed plan would ultimately complicate the existing plan and is not palatable due to regional oil and gas development, impact and associated growth.

In review of the mandatory criteria to be used for redistricting purposes, equity/deviation in population, compact and contiguous districts, voting rights protections, and race; any plan should work to keep Richland County whole as in the existing plan or any subsequent plan. Additionally, consideration of discretionary criteria for legislative districts (following the boundary lines of counties, cities and town, and school districts) is not reflected in the community plan and again, complicates representation. Lastly, keeping communities of interest intact is the final criteria that I encourage the commission to consider fully moving forward. Sidney and our surrounding communities are of economic interest due to area oil and gas developments, population influx and growth, occupational growth, changing culture and lifestyles, trade and industry, and for other related reasons.

As per the criteria, "all congressional districts shall be as nearly equal in population as is practicable." Practicable is the operable word in our region at present and I would again ask the commission to consider keeping Richland County whole based on the aforementioned criteria—the Community Plan will be a disservice to Richland County and the Community of Sidney.

Sincerely,

Daniel T. Farr, EdD
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Kelly Dey, Chairperson, Sidney Board of Trustees

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