



City of Tacoma

Mayor Marilyn Strickland

October 10, 2011

Commissioners
Washington State Redistricting Commission
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Commissioners:

The City of Tacoma has previously addressed you concerning our preferences for adjustment to State legislative districts. At the time, we did not address Congressional boundaries because we were confident that few meaningful changes would be made in our area. Even with the addition of a new Congressional district complicating your work, we were certain that we would not see anything more than minor adjustments to current districts in this area.

That is why we were alarmed to discover that one of the four draft proposals for Congressional districts is nothing short of a radical realignment of representation in the Tacoma area. And it is clear from the proposals by the other three commissioners that such major changes are not needed to complete your work.

Tacoma has been part of the 6th Congressional district for decades. While the district has shifted territory significantly over that time, Tacoma has always remained its hub. We very much want that to continue. Redistricting is a difficult balance between accommodating a growing population and keeping traditional communities together. We applaud Commissioners Gorton, Foster and Ceis for recognizing this and offer no preference between their proposals. Tacoma should remain a part of the 6th Congressional district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marilyn Strickland".

Marilyn Strickland

Mayor
City of Tacoma

The News Tribune

Norm Dicks and Tacoma: A duo that belongs together

THE NEWS TRIBUNE

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Redraw the political map purely for the benefit of Pierce County, and you'd get a bizarre gerrymander in which four or five congressional districts somehow fan out from the Tacoma Dome.

The more members of Congress looking out for Pierce County's interests, the better.

That, alas, can't happen. The four-member redistricting commission now overhauling the state's political boundaries must pay lip service to geography and is supposed to keep communities as intact to the extent possible. We trust the final plan will also keep a key relationship intact – the one between Tacoma and U.S. Rep. Norm Dicks.

The unspoken – but overriding – priority of nearly any redistricting effort is to protect incumbents and maximize partisan advantage. Washington's commission is designed for political parity: Two of its members are appointed by Republicans, two by Democrats. Collectively, they're tasked with drawing lines that both parties can live with.

This is an exceedingly complex job, akin to solving an algebraic equation with way too many variables. There are all kinds of reasons to stretch the lines of a particular district one way or another. In fact, the addition of a new congressional district – Washington's 10th – is forcing a wholesale readjustment of boundaries for both Congress and the Legislature.

It's pretty much a given that Democrat Adam Smith will continue to represent the Tacoma area in the U.S. House of Representatives, for the simple reason that he lives in Tacoma.

Dicks – who lives in Belfair – is not a given. In fact, one commission member, former Republican legislative leader Tom Huff, has offered a map that would lop off the eastern finger of Dicks' 6th Congressional District that currently encompasses Gig Harbor and much of Tacoma.

Much as we respect Huff, we think that's a terrible idea.

Dicks has represented Tacoma superbly for more than 34 years, ever since he was first elected to the U.S. House in 1976.

Over the years, Dicks has had some role in nearly every major improvement to the city. He played a big part in the rehabilitation of Union Station, the creation of the Interstate 705 spur, the historic land use settlement with the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, the state Route 509 bypass around the Port of Tacoma and the Foss Waterway cleanup – all of which contributed greatly to the city's renaissance in the 1980s and 1990s.

While he's often been perceived as a sort of Santa Claus bringing home congressional loot, he has also been a behind-the-scenes dealmaker and negotiator who has helped break down institutional barriers to such key projects.

Tacoma could not have hoped for a more effective representative than Dicks has been for more than three decades now. The state's new political map must keep that bond intact.

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