SEATTLE REGIONAL HEARING

(Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington)

University Of Washington School Of Law
Seattle, Washington
April 28, 2014

NATIONAL COMMISSIONER
Dolores Huerta, Lifelong Community Activist, Social Justice Organizer- co-founder of the United Farm Workers, President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation

GUEST COMMISSIONERS
Rex Burkholder, Principal, Burkholder Consulting
Dean Foster, Commissioner, Washington State Redistricting Commission
Hon. Charles Johnson (ret.), NAACP

PANELISTS
Kim Able, President, League of Women Voters of Washington
Matt Barreto, Professor, University of Washington
Scott Crichton, Executive Director, ACLU of Montana
Tami Davis, Office of the Washington Secretary of State
Kappy Eaton, Coordinator, League of Women Voters of Oregon
Mary Flowers, Seattle NAACP
Emilio Garza, Engagement Coordinator, Washington Bus
Josh Goldberg, Policy Advisor, Office of the Oregon Secretary of State
Esther Harlow, Disability Rights of Oregon
Emily Jameson, Oregon Voice
Abba Khanna, Attorney, Perkins Coie, LLP
David Lord, Director of Public Policy, Disability Rights Washington
Mack Murray, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
David Perez, Attorney, Perkins Coie, LLP
Grace Villanueva
Art Wang, APACE
Julie Wise, Voter Services Manager, King County Department of Elections
Rhonda Whiting, Chairman, Western Native Voice

PUBLIC TESTIMONY
Mary Carpenter, National Federation of the Blind
Marjorie Easley, Former President, League of Women Voters of Oregon
Allison Eisinger, Seattle Coalition on Homelessness
Delores Gilmore, Manager, Kittitas County Elections
Sharon Maeda, Seattle Immigrant Voting Rights Task Force
Cindy Van Winkle, President, Washington Council of the Blind
Tong Kinwah, Board Member, Chinese Progressive Association
Chris Maynard, BSBA candidate, Suffolk University
Andy Morgan, Public Policy Assistant, Rosie’s Place
Leila Quinn, Generation Citizen
Grace Ross, Worcester resident

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
Laughlin McDonald

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS (NOT EXHAUSTIVE)
ACLU of Montana Foundation
ACLU of Washington Foundation
APACE
Disability Rights Oregon
Disability Rights Washington
Forward Montana
League of Women Voters of Idaho
League of Women Voters of Oregon
League of Women Voters of Washington
Montana Conservation Voters
APACE
NAACP
OneAmerica
Oregon Bus Project
Oregon Voice
University of Washington School of Law
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
The Washington Bus
Western States Center
Win/Win Network

SEATTLE REGIONAL HEARING HIGHLIGHTS

On April 28, approximately 100 voters, activists, and voting rights advocates gathered at the University of Washington School of Law in Seattle, Wash. to share their experiences of the voting challenges they continue to face in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington at a hearing convened by the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Witnesses testified about numerous issues creating barriers to equal participation in the democratic process in the Pacific Northwest, including school district vote dilution in Montana, the prevalence of racial bloc voting in central and eastern Washington, and vote dilution in Yakima, Wash.

I. Vote Dilution in Wolf Point, Montana School District

Scott Crichton of the ACLU of Montana discussed a lawsuit against the Wolf Point School District in Montana on behalf of seven Native American voters who claimed they were being denied the equal right to representation on the school board because of improper voting districts.1 According to Crichton, the voting districts at the time of the lawsuit gave each

resident of the majority white voting district more say on the school board than each resident of the majority Native American voting district. Under that system, Crichton said, members of the majority white voting district had elected one board member for every 143 residents and those in the majority Native American district elected one board member for every 841 residents. The case was settled this year, with the new plan creating single-member districts with a population variance of no more than 1.54 percent.

II. Racial Bloc Voting in Central and Eastern Washington

Several panelists discussed the highly polarized voting in central and eastern Washington.

Professor Matt Barreto, of the University of Washington, discussed these racially polarized voting patterns and how the widespread use of at-large voting in the area leads to Latinos being vastly underrepresented in local government.

Graciela Villanueva discussed her personal experience falling victim to this polarization in a recent school board election in Yakima, Washington. Villanueva was running as an appointed incumbent, and her opponent dropped out of the race several months before the election, yet that opponent won election with 61 percent of the vote. According to Villanueva, many voters admitted that race was a factor in voting for her opponent.

David Perez, of Perkins Coie LLP, discussed State Supreme Court Justice Stephen Gonzalez’ reelection election campaign (he had been appointed), outlining how an opponent (Bruce Danielson) filed to run against him at the last minute, and—despite Justice Gonzalez raising the most money and securing endorsements from both parties (Danielson raised no money and did not campaign)—Danielson won many counties in central and eastern Washington by large margins (Gonzalez won reelection by racking up large margins in King County (Seattle) and several surrounding counties).

---

III. Vote Dilution in Yakima, Washington

Abha Khanna, of Perkins Coie LLP, discussed a Section 2 lawsuit brought against the City of Yakima regarding its at-large council districts. According to Khanna, no Latino has ever won a seat on the seven-member city council despite Latinos constituting 41 percent of the city’s population and 22 percent of its citizen voting age population. Further, Khanna noted that the only Latino candidate who has served on the city council had been appointed to the position and lost her reelection bid despite having the advantage of incumbency.

---