

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 Hon. Charles Johnson (ret.), NAACP
Dean Foster, Commissioner, Washington State
Redistricting Commission

PANELISTS

Kim Able, President, League of Women Voters of Washington	Esther Harlow, Disability Rights of Oregon
Matt Barreto, Professor, University of Washington	Emily Jameson, Oregon Voice
Scott Crichton, Executive Director, ACLU of Montana	Abba Khanna, Attorney, Perkins Coie, LLP
Tami Davis, Office of the Washington Secretary of State	David Lord, Director of Public Policy, Disability Rights Washington
Kappy Eaton, Coordinator, League of Women Voters of Oregon	Mack Murray, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Mary Flowers, Seattle NAACP	David Perez, Attorney, Perkins Coie, LLP
Emilio Garza, Engagement Coordinator, Washington Bus	Grace Villanueva
Josh Goldberg, Policy Advisor, Office of the Oregon Secretary of State	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	Delores Gilmore, Manager, Kittitas County Elections
Marjorie Easley, Former President, League of Women Voters of Oregon	Sharon Maeda, Seattle Immigrant Voting Rights Task Force
Allison Eisinger, Seattle Coalition on Homelessness	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

APACE

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

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

¹ See Consent Decree, *Jackson v. Wolf Point Sch. Dist.*, No. CV-13-65-GF-BMM-RKS (D. Mont. Mar. 13, 2014), available at aclumontana.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/WolfPointConsentDecree.pdf.

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.² 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).

² See Rafael Guerrero, *School board candidate who withdrew from race says she plans to serve*, *Yakima Herald* (Nov. 7, 2013), <http://www.yakimaherald.com/photosandvideos/latestphotos/1640067-8/school-board-candidate-who-withdrew-from-race-says>; *Voters, take note of local campaign dropouts, empty state tax votes*, *Yakima Herald* (Oct. 23, 2013), <http://www.yakimaherald.com/news/yhr/wednesday/1599796-8/voters-take-note-of-local-campaign-dropouts-empty>

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.³ 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.

³ See *Complaint, Montes v. City of Yakima, No. 2:12-cv-03108-TOR (E.D. Wash. Aug. 22, 2012)*, available at <https://aclu-wa.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2012-08-22--Dkt%201--Complaint.pdf>.