



Dear Commissioners:

My name is Jason Olson, and I am the Director of IndependentVoice.Org, a California association of independent voters fighting to take control of our democracy away from the political parties and give it back to the voters. I apologize for not attending this meeting in person, but in the end I decided that telling my wife we were going to spend our first wedding anniversary testifying in front of a Commission would be hazardous to my health. My thanks to my colleague Catana Barnes for presenting this to you.

On a serious note, it has not gone unnoticed by the independents in our network that the Commission is holding these hearings exclusively in so-called "battleground" states. These independents, already deeply suspicious of a government that seems to always do what is in the interest of the political parties, rather than the people, wonder aloud if the commission is interested in making our voting process more equitable for the voters, or simply attempting to mitigate the most visible dysfunction of a partisan election process that locks out nearly 40% of Americans who identify as independents.

I continue to tell the independents in our network that it is our job - the job of ordinary Americans concerned with the future of this country - to educate the Commissioners. As much as this process and commission was born in partisan politics in Washington DC, it is the American people that must attempt to free it from the constraints of a partisan mindset that only cares about voters who "matter" in the eyes of the major political parties, rather than figuring out how to make all voters "matter".

One of the things that can be missed by not coming to California is how we are leading the country on these issues. Our organization helped pass a top-two non-partisan election system and two redistricting reform measures that went into effect for the 2012 election. The results were dramatic. Eight incumbents were defeated in 2012 - as compared with only one in the previous five election cycles combined. Independents - the fastest growing segment of the electorate in California for over 20 years - had the right to participate fully and equally. Because of this, the primary and general election campaigns themselves looked different from previous years and focused on real issues. In districts where one major party has a significant advantage, voters were often asked to choose between two candidates of the same party rather than being presented with a non-choice of an automatic winner (the party with the advantage) and an automatic loser (the disadvantaged major party). This year, California actually passed a budget on time for the first time in memory.

I invite the Commission to more fully explore what it means that every voter counts, rather than just making sure that every vote is counted. We'll welcome you to California with open arms whenever you'd like to come.

Sincerely,

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