

# **Exhibit C**

## Opinion

## The Seattle Times

# Why I resigned as chair of the redistricting commission

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Sarah Augustine resigned as chair of the Washington State Redistricting Commission.

By [Sarah Augustine](#)

*Special to The Times*

On Monday, I resigned as chair of the Washington State Redistricting Commission because the Secretary of State and the legislative leaders refuse to defend in federal court the

Intervenors  
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legislative district plan created by the independent commission.

By doing so, they refuse to defend the interests of thousands of those who engaged in the redistricting process that are reflected in the plan, and Washington state law. Their refusal to act undermines the legitimacy and independence of the commission, and therefore the process enshrined in our constitution. Worse, it undermines the values that drive the redistricting process in Washington state: Independence from political influence, collaboration and bipartisan compromise.

When I was asked to consider serving as chair, I agreed because, while we live in a time when our nation faces widening political polarization, I believe in democratic institutions. I believed that, by engaging voting commissioners in a process that asked them to serve the public good by rising above their own individual or political interests, we had an opportunity to demonstrate collective representation in action.

As chair, I prioritized engaging as many Washingtonians as possible in the process. Commission staff undertook the largest and most accessible outreach effort in redistricting history that resulted in more than 6,000 electronic comments, hundreds of thousands of engagements through social media and more than 400 state residents providing public testimony.

The 2021 redistricting commission was also the first to adopt a tribal consultation policy, guaranteeing constructive communication with federally recognized tribal governments, acknowledging tribal sovereignty and respecting the government-to-government relationship. The interests of thousands of individuals, communities and interest groups were heard by commissioners, and their interests are memorialized in the maps.

The four voting members of the redistricting commission arrived at consensus on final congressional and legislative redistricting plans, albeit late, and the House and the

Senate approved final plans on Feb. 2 and Feb. 8, respectively. These plans, and the final maps they contain, are now Washington state law.

Washington state is one of only a handful of states with an independent commission, where the minority and majority leaders of the Senate and the House each appoint one registered voter to the commission. To ensure the commission's independence, appointees must not have served in public office, or as an officer in a political party, in the two-year period preceding their tenure. Together, the four appointees are empowered to draw legislative and congressional boundaries across the state on behalf of all Washingtonians. For a redistricting plan to become the law, it must be affirmed by at least three voting commissioners, requiring bipartisan agreement.

This intentionally bipartisan process is meant to ensure a spirit of collaboration over partisanship, and compromise over winner-takes-all. It is Washington state's attempt to avoid gerrymandering, which occurs in states where the legislature draws the maps and the party that holds the majority in the legislature can draw boundaries to its political advantage.

There is a community that feels they must challenge the Washington legislative district map, specifically asking for the 15<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> districts to be redrawn. Their lawsuit is part of the due process guaranteed to all Americans, and I affirm the rights of the community seeking relief to be heard in federal court. However, by refusing to defend the legislative plan in question, Washington leaders undermine the values enshrined in it: Independence from political influence, bipartisan compromise and public engagement; they are dismissing the interests of thousands of those who engaged in the redistricting process that are reflected in the map.

The responsibility of the Secretary of State, Speaker of the House and Senate Majority leader is, I believe, to stand up for the process — and the independent bipartisan compromise reached, rather than seeking to gain political advantage through a redrawn district that ignores the enormous public input that influenced the compromise.

It has been suggested that the argument over the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> districts is a justice issue for vulnerable communities of color; a coalition of Latino voters believes the current district boundaries will not allow Latinos the chance to elect candidates of their choice. However, their suit directly demands splitting the Yakama Reservation by bringing towns on the Yakama Reservation into the 15<sup>th</sup> district, in direct opposition to the interests of the Yakama Nation reflected in the current plan. In government-to-

government consultation, the Yakama Nation required that Yakama territories be contained in one district. By refusing to defend the law, aren't Washington leaders hanging out to dry communities of color, like the Yakama Nation, whose interests are expressed in the final map?

If Washington leaders will not defend the interests expressed in the map, are individual community members who live in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> districts expected to do this? Do we expect communities of interest in this rural area to raise the cash for a defense of the law in federal court, when Washington state is obligated to do so? It appears this way to me.

Unfortunately, since many vulnerable communities of color will not have the opportunity to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars in a matter of weeks, their interests will go undefended. Meanwhile, contrary to the spirit of our redistricting framework, a political advantage may be gained through a court process without defendants, undermining faith in yet one more democratic process.

I did not sign up for that!

***Sarah Augustine*** is executive director, Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties.

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