

**Summary of Public Hearing
of the
State of Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission**

Location: Safford/Thatcher

Date: June 26, 2001

In Attendance:

Commissioners:

Daniel Elder
Joshua Hall

Commission Attorneys:

Jose Rivera

NDC Staff:

Ralph A. Rossum

There were approximately 90 people in attendance.

Several points were expressly made or concurred in by all the speakers. First, they argued that the Gila Valley should not be divided into two separate state legislative districts as it was after the 1990 census. They argued that being divided has neutralized to a great extent their ability to influence the outcome of elections. They also argued that besides representation problems, division made it difficult to achieve an informed electorate.

Second, Graham and Greenlee Counties share a community of interests based on agriculture, mining, forest issues, endangered species issues, open spaces, ranching, recreation, water, and healthcare; therefore, they should be kept together in a single legislative district.

Third, a new congressional district should be formed that optimizes rural Arizona representation – they hoped that “there would be some way to find enough folks in rural Arizona that we could have at least one rural congressman from Arizona who would . . . represent us, who would understand our needs and concerns.”

Seven speakers supported the resolutions of Graham County and the Eastern Arizona Counties Organization (consisting of Apache, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, and Navajo Counties) calling for a rural legislative district that would include southern Apache and Navajo Counties and Greenlee, Graham, and Gila Counties. They argued that these counties are all approximately equal in size and would therefore have an equal chance of being heard, with no one community dominating, and they argued that these counties share common economic, geographic, cultural, and legislative interests with each other. They argued against a legislative district that would include Cochise and Santa Cruz counties on the grounds that Sierra Vista would dominate the Gila Valley and “put us at a

tremendous disadvantage.” One speaker noted the presence of a military base near Sierra Vista and argued that “their community of interest to a large degree is different than our community of interest,” which is basically agriculture and mining.

Three speakers urged the formation of a legislative district oriented toward the South that would encompass Graham, Greenlee, Cochise, and Santa Cruz counties. They argued that these counties shared a community of interest based on their membership in the Southeastern Arizona Governor’s Organization and Southeastern Arizona Behavioral Health Services. They stressed the difficulty of traveling throughout a district that would go to the North: “Try getting to Apache and Navajo County in the winter. It’s not that easy. It’s not that accessible for the common person.” One also mentioned the importance of representing the Hispanic population and doubted whether going with Navajo and Apache Counties would be beneficial in that respect.

Two speakers saw merits in aligning either with the North or South, while another believed that there was a community of interest (especially in the health-care field) involving Graham and Greenlee Counties and the rural northern edge of Cochise County.

The hearing was adjourned by Commissioner Hall at 9:00 p.m.

AURs: Southern Apache and Navajo counties together with Greenlee,
 Graham and Gila counties (Eastern Arizona Counties Organization)
 Gila Valley (without Sierra Vista)

NOTE: These summaries and excerpts were developed for the Independent Redistricting Commission by its consultant, National Demographics Corporation, and have not been reviewed by the Commission prior to posting. They are not official statements of the Commission and represent only the consultant’s best effort to identify major themes and highlights of each public hearing. The excerpts were chosen by the consultant in an effort to identify common themes and especially noteworthy statements.

These materials are placed here for citizen review and with the hope that they will encourage comments. Comments can be made on the form provided.