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Congressman Duncan on Redistricting

The following is a copy of a letter from Congressman Jeff Duncan that will be read at this evenings redistricting hearing

“On April 2nd 2009, I announced my candidacy for United States Congress. Over the course of these past few years, I have had the chance to get to know the people of the Third Congressional District as potential voters and constituents, but most importantly as friends. The residents of Aiken, Edgefield, and McCormick counties have invited me into their homes, shared their stories, and prayed for my family and me.”

“The people who reside in the southern half of the Third District are nothing short of some of the finest individuals this country has to offer, and some of the greatest people I have ever met. They are entrepreneurs, small business owners, and farmers. They are former and current employees of the Savannah River Site whose talents help keep our nation safe. And they are military veterans, policemen, firefighters, and teachers who sacrifice every day to give back to our communities.”

“Representing these inspiring individuals in Congress is one of the highest honors and greatest responsibilities I could ever imagine. Which leads us to the bittersweet topic of this evenings meeting, redistricting. While I’m thrilled that South Carolina’s increased population will result in a Seventh Congressional District for the first time since World War II, I would consider any redistricting plan that changes who I have the pleasure of representing as a great loss.”

“The ten counties that form the Third District create a unique balance in regards to demographics and needs. The district is anchored in nuclear power on both ends with the Oconee Nuclear Station to the north and the Savannah River Site to the south. District wide, small businesses continue to be the driving force in the economy, especially agribusiness that can be found from Pumpkin Town to Ridge Spring.”

“With the release of new census data, the information makes clear that the Third District will be forced to shrink in population to make room for the new Congressional seat. My wish is for the General Assembly to strongly take into consideration the wisdom of the current district boundaries and make as few changes as Constitutionally possible.”

“I appreciate you taking the time to listen to the public’s concerns on this very important matter, and hope you will listen to their concerns above all others as you make your decision.”

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**Testimony by Katie O'Connor, Staff Attorney, Voting Rights Project
Prepared for the House Subcommittee on Redistricting
April 11, 2011 in Aiken, SC**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Katie O'Connor, and I am here to testify on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union Voting Rights Project.

I'd like to start by thanking the members of the subcommittee for holding this public hearing, and several other public hearings across the state. Because redistricting determines the composition of districts in which individuals elect their representatives, every voter has a vital stake in the outcome of their community's redistricting, and every voter should feel welcome to participate in the process. This sort of collaboration between lawmakers, redistricting experts, individuals and organizations to draw and analyze plans and promote transparency in the redistricting process is absolutely essential. So thank you.

Fair and equal representation is the cornerstone of American democracy. The U.S. Constitution requires states to apportion their congressional districts according to the "one person, one vote" principle, and the Supreme Court has interpreted the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as requiring state legislative seats to be apportioned according to the "one person, one vote" principle as well.

Improper redistricting can result in unequal representation in voting districts, dilution of minority votes and fractured communities. In addition to the "one person, one vote" principle, a redistricting plan must be drawn utilizing traditional redistricting principles (such as compactness, contiguity, preservation of county lines and communities of interest, and competitiveness).

A redistricting plan must also take into consideration the Voting Rights Act, which prohibits the use of redistricting plans that result in diluting minority voting strength. Communities of color, in particular, have faced numerous obstacles to meaningful participation in the political process, including the redistricting process. The federal Voting Rights Act includes protection provisions to ensure these communities' effective involvement in the political process. Compliance with the Voting Rights Act ensures that racial and language minorities must have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and elect candidates of choice.

We look forward to collaborating with this committee, individual voters, and other interested parties over the next several months in drawing fair and equal districts for South Carolina's state legislature and seven congressional seats.