

Redistricting Hearings
June 22, 2011, Gulf Coast College, Panama City
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There are **three messages** I have crafted that are aimed at protecting and/or strengthening the voice of Jackson County and rural Florida in the legislature.

These three positions, or principals, are deliberately broad, but also very specific and measurable in their goals.

My basis for these messages include years of dialogue with chamber members who have watched the influence of rural Florida dwindle, as well as discussions with our legislative delegation and many other civic and business leaders throughout Jackson County and beyond.

First, I believe rural areas constitute a "community of interest" that would benefit if their influence is concentrated rather than dispersed. The "beach economy", the "bigger city markets", and "rural markets" each have unique needs and concerns best served by legislators solely focused on those needs and concerns. Districts aligned according to these "communities of interest" will be better equipped to articulate their common cause and aggregate the power needed to make sure their voice is heard and their needs addressed.

Second, Jackson County currently benefits from having 2 representatives with a strong understanding of rural needs. Going back to just one representative for one county would further weaken the political influence of rural areas like Jackson County and shift more power to larger markets. Without strong voices from rural representatives, it is very easy for rural concerns to be overrun by large market needs and political power. We need to maintain coverage by two representatives with a mutual focus on rural needs.

Third, "2 mile wide, 200 mile long", winding gerrymandered districts with multiple environments (rural, big city, beach) make it very difficult for a representative or senator to stay closely connected to their constituents and deliver a focused message. Creating more compact geographic districts is extremely beneficial from a travel, logistics, and access perspective, **so long** as those boundaries take into account the previous two concerns – Concentrations of Communities of Interest, and Dual Member Representation.

If the redistricting committee and the legislature adhere to these three principals, the specifics of where the actual lines are drawn will be a cause for celebration rather than a cause for concern.

On behalf of the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce and myself, I respectfully request that the spirit of these three principals be incorporated into the strategic framework for developing this plan for redistricting. Thank you for your time and consideration.