



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Commissioners Martins, Nesbitt, Stephens, Conway, and Brady vote to submit plan to the Legislature**

In 2014, New York State voters took the extraordinary step of amending the State’s Constitution to create the Independent Redistricting Commission (the Commission). In doing so the State’s voters demonstrated unequivocally their desire that politicians no longer draw their own districts and that overt partisanship be removed from the line drawing process. The Commission was charged with setting aside partisan considerations and working collaboratively to present redistricting maps for the Legislature’s consideration. Each member of the Commission has time and again during this process reaffirmed their individual commitment to do just that.

Just two months ago, the voters of New York again reaffirmed their collective will for a fair, nonpartisan redistricting process by soundly defeating Proposition I that would have undermined the 2014 amendment by reintroducing partisanship. No matter how those who supported the initiative tried to spin the Proposition, including the democrat appointed Commissioners on the IRC, New York’s voters clearly did not wish partisanship reintroduced to the redistricting process.

Following a series of nine (9) virtual listening tour sessions, drafting preliminary maps, and fifteen (15) public hearings across the State, the Commission’s mission was to work together to build consensus on a joint set of maps that were acceptable to the Commission as a whole. To that end, the Commissioners were charged with following the specific mandate of the State Constitution in drawing districts that encompassed communities of interest and not partisan advantage. At every hearing, Commission members stressed that the preliminary maps presented on September 15<sup>th</sup> were not final and would invariably change to reflect the public input received – that such input was key. Further, every Commission member committed to work together to arrive at a single set of maps.

During the Commission’s final hearings on Long Island, all the Commissioners agreed upon a process for reaching consensus and arriving at a single set of maps for presentation to the Legislature. It was agreed that the Commission’s line drawers would create baseline maps based on the preliminary maps introduced in September and testimony received at the Commission’s hearings and otherwise submitted for the Commission’s consideration. The baseline maps would then serve as the predicate for the Commission’s consensus building and negotiations.

With the process in place, the Commission divided the State into regions and appointed subgroups to discuss and negotiate each region with the express goal of arriving at a single set of consensus maps. The subgroups began meeting on December 7<sup>th</sup> and continued for the following two weeks

– working collaboratively and successfully. By December 21<sup>st</sup> the consensus maps were substantially complete. The Commission was working on a handful of punchlist items that remained to be resolved and was making progress on resolving those.

Notwithstanding the acknowledged joint effort and progress that was made in arriving at the consensus maps, on December 21<sup>st</sup> the democrat appointed Commissioners, all five of them, abruptly turned their backs on the consensus maps and the negotiations. They advised the Commission that they would no longer participate in any further discussions regarding the maps that had been substantially completed, presented a unilaterally prepared, partisan map in its stead, and further advised that they would only negotiate on their newly presented partisan maps. There was no forewarning or irreconcilable impasse.

The map presented by the democrat appointed Commissioners on December 21<sup>st</sup> was virtually identical to the partisan map they presented in September before the hearings, the testimony, and the Commission’s negotiations. Despite their prevarications, their proposed maps had not been and could not have been informed by the testimony or the Commission’s collective discussions and negotiations in arriving at the consensus maps.

Five of the Commission’s ten members turned their backs on the process they committed to complete thereby hoping that the handful of open items would remain unresolved. The democrat appointed Commissioners even went so far as to encourage us to present their own partisan maps.

We chose a different path, refusing to abandon the process we had all agreed to and the resulting substantially completed consensus maps. We chose instead to complete the handful of open items and present the map we had all negotiated, specifically including changes and elements that the democrat appointed Commissioners had requested.

We specifically did not create and are not presenting partisan maps, but maps that are the product of the guiding principles we agreed to, those embedded in the State Constitution, the testimony the Commission received, and the Commission’s collective discussions and negotiations. We completed the Commission’s consensus maps.

The resulting maps represent the Commission’s collective best efforts to produce maps with contiguous and compact districts and population deviations as low as possible, while also being respectful of the completeness of villages, towns, cities, and counties where possible.

As you will see, the consensus Assembly maps keep nearly 95% of towns, cities, and counties whole, while Senate maps manage to keep thirty-eight (38) counties whole, nearly the maximum number possible given their respective populations. This was done while keeping all but sixteen (16) Assembly districts and all but one (1) Senate district within two percent (2%) deviation from the ideal population.

For all of the foregoing, it is our hope that the consensus plan will be considered favorably by the State Legislature.

The plan we present today is the culmination of the redistricting process as reflected in the State Constitution – it was substantially completed by the entire Commission working collaboratively. In it, the Commission applied the principles enumerated in the State Constitution, rejected stark partisanship, and reached consensus. Through the Commission’s joint effort, the interests of all New Yorkers have substituted traditional partisan interests. It is a win for all New Yorkers, it is a plan worthy of the State Legislature’s support, and it is a plan worthy of our great State.

Our only regret is that five of our colleagues on the Commission walked away without so much as an explanation after having worked so diligently to arrive at a substantially completed plan. Their insights and preferences are nonetheless incorporated in the maps we present.