

## **A PUBLIC PLEDGE TO HEAR THE PEOPLE'S COMMON SENSE**

**By State Senator Les Ihara, Jr., 9th District**

My job is to serve all my constituents and the welfare of the community. I believe in listening to the people as a whole, hearing all the voices and views, and trying to find the best solutions and initiatives for our community.

When we face challenging issues, I believe we need to move beyond polarization, including the concerns and viewpoints of different people in ways that can generate some common sense solutions. To do this we need creative, thoughtful dialogue among diverse knowledgeable citizens, taking many perspectives into account.

One approach is for temporary "citizens' panels" made up of randomly selected ordinary folks to talk for a few days about the challenges we face and then let the rest of us know what they come up with.

I like that approach. So if a panel that reflects the diversity of our community comes up with a course of action that they believe serves the whole community, I pledge to take their recommendations seriously and to publicly announce how I will carry them out or why I cannot.

The organizers of the panel need to ensure a fair and creative process in service to the common good. So I will honor any panel that meets the following criteria:

1. It consists of at least a dozen, and preferably more, randomly selected ordinary citizens from this community. The selection is free of partisan bias.
2. The panel is clear on its purpose, rights and responsibilities, and understands the roles of others who are involved. All panelists are treated with respect and are given the support they need to do their job well.
3. If the panel is assigned a specific issue to deliberate on, they are provided with accessible, balanced, and practical briefing materials on all "sides" of that issue. This includes at least written material, testimony from experts, and a good opportunity to cross-examine those experts. The panel-briefing process is clearly fair to all major viewpoints.
4. The panel has adequate time to do its work. Previous experience suggests that four to five days is good for addressing an issue. Two days can suffice for more general "state of the community" reflections which don't involve expert testimony.
5. The panel gets support from content-neutral facilitation that ensures all perspectives are heard; that helps panelists questions and concerns get addressed; and that encourages panelists to creatively collaborate towards whatever common sense and common ground they all feel good about.
6. Panelists' activities are arranged to help them think, talk and learn without any pressure except time and conscience. Panelists are not lobbied or interviewed outside of meetings by people they don't already know, and they report any lobbying that does occur.
7. Panelists all sign a final document clearly stating any findings and recommendations upon which they all agree, as well as any remaining concerns or significant minority recommendations. Their recommendations can include the convening of one or more additional citizen panels.
8. The panel's statement is made available to the public and to the media at a public meeting and press conference. It can also be publicized in any other way, and I pledge to post it on my website for at least two months after it is released.

Anyone can organize such a citizens panel, but it is good to go over the design with me ahead of time. If the organizing process is open to examination to ensure it meets the above criteria and is free of major bias, I will take the findings seriously, as follows:

Within ten days I will publicly announce — through a press release, as well as on my website — what steps I will take to carry out their recommendations, or why I, as a public official, cannot accept the recommendations as presented. At least 48 hours before these public announcements, I will inform major groups on all sides, as well as the panelists and organizers of the citizens' panel, so they can respond.

I believe that, by helping us explore our differences and work together toward a deeper unity, this process can allow the true potential of our democracy to surface. I invite other public leaders to make a similar commitment to honoring the informed, trustworthy, and wise collective voice of the people we were elected to represent.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



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