

1 (Off the record at 12:11 p.m.)

2 (On the record at 1:14 p.m.)

3 CHAIR DICKISON: Time being 1:14. Calling the  
4 Applicant Review Panel meeting back to order.

5 I'd like to welcome Ms. Linda Akutagawa. Did I  
6 say that correctly?

7 MS. AKUTAGAWA: It's close.

8 CHAIR DICKISON: Okay.

9 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Akutagawa.

10 CHAIR DICKISON: Akutagawa, thank you. Welcome  
11 for your interview for today. I'm going to turn the right  
12 over to Mr. Chris Dawson to read you the five standard  
13 questions.

14 MR. DAWSON: Thank you, Madam Chair.

15 Good afternoon Ms. Akutagawa. I'm going to read  
16 you five standard questions that the Panel has requested  
17 that each applicant respond to. Are you ready?

18 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Yes.

19 MR. DAWSON: First question. What skills and  
20 attributes should all Commissioners possess?

21 What skills or competencies should the Commission  
22 possess collectively?

23 Of the skills, attributes and competencies that  
24 each Commissioner should possess, which do you possess?

25 In summary, how will you contribute to the

1 success of the Commission?

2 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, to the question of what  
3 skills and attributes should all Commissioners possess and,  
4 specifically, what skills or competencies should the  
5 Commission possess collectively. I believe that in  
6 addition to the three that were noted on the website,  
7 relevant analytical skills, ability to be impartial,  
8 appreciation for California's diverse demographics and  
9 geography, I also believe that these are some other skills  
10 and attributes that the Commission should have  
11 collectively.

12 One, curiosity. Two, open-mindedness. Three,  
13 critical thinking or the ability to discern fact from  
14 fiction, objectivity versus opinion. Next would be number  
15 four, ability to balance competing needs. Five, long-  
16 standing knowledge of California. And in my opinion, at  
17 least ten plus years of residency given the task that this  
18 Commission is being charged with. Next would be legal  
19 knowledge, understanding of political landscapes, common  
20 sense, and people before party.

21 I think that the task of redistricting is one  
22 that I think collectively, while each person may not have  
23 each one, I think collectively this is the skills and  
24 attributes, competencies that I would love to see on a  
25 Commission, as a resident of the State of California.

1           B, in terms of, of the skills, attributes and  
2 competencies that each Commissioner should possess, which  
3 do I possess? I believe that -- in no particular order, I  
4 believe that I do have the ability to be impartial. I  
5 believe that I am open-minded. I most definitely believe  
6 that I have an appreciation for California's diverse  
7 demographics and geography. I do have a long-standing  
8 knowledge of California as a native Californian. I believe  
9 that I have curiosity, as well as the analytical and  
10 critical thinking skills. And also, the ability to balance  
11 competing needs.

12           In summary, I believe I would contribute to the  
13 success of this Commission in two ways. And I think -- I  
14 say two ways because I believe that there are two ways to  
15 measure success of the Commission. One is the Commission's  
16 end product, which is the redistricting map. And second is  
17 the Commission's process.

18           So, with the end product or the redistricting  
19 maps, collectively I believe that all Commissioners would  
20 bring our skills and attributes to ensure redistricting  
21 that meets the following objectives. Fact-based,  
22 objective, credible, sound, clear, and legally defensible.

23           Individually, I believe that I would contribute  
24 to the credibility of the Commission's work and, therefore,  
25 its success by bringing to the forefront my experiences

1 shaped as a minority within a minority, growing up in  
2 California. And now, as a leader in one of our state's  
3 fast-growing communities, for me I will always carry  
4 memories and feelings shaped by invisibility and  
5 marginalization.

6 Through my work I both seek out and am often  
7 exposed to the demographic, geographic, and economic  
8 diversity of California. I believe that my work and my  
9 experiences growing up in California motivates me to be  
10 mindful of others who may not be part of the larger  
11 majority or larger minority, and it pushes me to ensure  
12 that all diverse points of view are included, balanced, and  
13 considered.

14 I believe that I'll also contribute to the  
15 objectivity, soundness, clarity of the Commission's  
16 redistricting work through my values and belief in fairness  
17 and equity. It drives my actions to be open-minded,  
18 curious, and also questioning of the status quo.

19 My values also include a strong belief in the  
20 importance of high quality work and I will expect to draw  
21 often from my analytical and thinking critical thinking  
22 skills to ensure that the Commission's work will be fact-  
23 based and legally defensible.

24 However, for the Commission to be successful and  
25 achieve an end product that meets all of these desired

1 outcomes, I believe we must all commit to a process in  
2 which we all listen actively and carefully, ask the hard  
3 questions, be willing to challenge each other and the  
4 status quo. Be willing to be wrong. Engage fully. Insure  
5 inclusivity. Seek and proffer diverse perspectives. And  
6 most importantly follow the rule of law and apply  
7 appropriate legal principles and standards.

8           And given that this is a high stakes process that  
9 will be influenced by competing agendas and perhaps large  
10 egos, I believe I can bring in my abilities as an  
11 experienced and long-time facilitator, and utilize my  
12 skills such as active listening, ensuring equal  
13 participation, and moving the discussions forward to meet  
14 goals and objectives.

15           I've also learned that focusing on common  
16 objectives that also result in benefits for a broader group  
17 of people or organizations often yields greater and more  
18 impactful results for all.

19           Also, additionally, as CEO of a nonprofit  
20 organization, I often have to balance the needs and  
21 interests of my staff with the needs and interests of my  
22 board of directors. And I believe that I would bring those  
23 competencies, such as impartial consideration of all  
24 perspectives, careful analysis of data, thoughtful  
25 consideration of the needs of the minority, as well as the

1 majority, keeping in mind the greater good and not what is  
2 beneficial to an individual or a single entity, as well as  
3 additional skills and ability to contribute to the success  
4 of the Commission.

5 Work -- well, I guess question number two, I  
6 guess. Should I just move on to that or --

7 MR. DAWSON: Okay. Should I go ahead -- and let  
8 me ask question number two. Work on the Commission  
9 requires members of different political backgrounds to work  
10 together. Since the 2010 Commission was selected and  
11 formed, the American political conversation has become  
12 increasingly polarized, whether in the press, on social  
13 media, and even in our own families.

14 What characteristics do you possess, and what  
15 characteristics should your fellow Commissioners possess,  
16 that will protect against hyperpartisanship?

17 What will you do to ensure that the work of the  
18 Commission is not seen as polarized or hyperpartisan and  
19 avoid perceptions of political bias and conflict?

20 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Thank you for that question. I  
21 think in terms of the characteristics that I believe I  
22 possess that will protect against hyperpartisanship, I  
23 believe that I do bring the ability to be impartial and  
24 open-minded. Also, curious. And also, bringing my  
25 analytical and critical thinking skills. And as I had said

1 earlier, I think that ability to discern fact from fiction,  
2 and also to discern objective opinion versus subjective  
3 opinion. And the ability to balance competing needs.

4 I will share that I do come from a politically  
5 mixed family and so, I've learned to navigate different  
6 political perspectives and philosophies. And also, being a  
7 native Californian I very much have an appreciation for our  
8 state's diverse demographics and geography. And also,  
9 having been here for my entire life, definitely I believe a  
10 long-standing knowledge of the state, having seen it just  
11 evolve in the way it has, and as it continues to evolve.

12 I believe that fellow Commissioners should also  
13 possess the skills, as I mentioned that were on the  
14 website. The relevant analytical skills and the ability to  
15 be impartial and an appreciation for our state's diverse  
16 demographics and geography. And I think those three were  
17 on there because I think those are the minimal  
18 characteristics that we should all have.

19 But in addition to that, I think it would be  
20 nice, again, for our other fellow Commissioners to bring on  
21 curiosity and open-mindedness as well, too, and the  
22 critical thinking skills, and the ability to balance  
23 competing needs.

24 I would also say people before party. I think  
25 those things would at least be able to ensure that we'll be

1 looking for that common good and what is going to be the  
2 best for the State of California and its residents.

3 In terms of what would I do to ensure that the  
4 work of the Commission is not seen as polarized, or  
5 hyperpartisan, or avoid perceptions of political bias and  
6 conflict. When I responded to the question above, as well  
7 as the previous questions, and also the questions on the  
8 application form, I believe that I responded to those  
9 questions with that particular question in mind. How do we  
10 avoid hyperpartisanship or perceptions of political bias  
11 and conflict.

12 I think that having that is definitely one of the  
13 influencing factors in the way I think I would shape all of  
14 my answers. I think given the state of our political  
15 discourse nationally, as well as just in terms of our  
16 regional and local politics, the perceptions may be hard to  
17 avoid. But as much as possible, I would seek to stay  
18 focused and remind the other members of the Commission that  
19 we have a larger vision and mission to accomplish, the  
20 successful achievement of the Commission's end goal and  
21 product.

22 And additionally, while this may seem cliché, I  
23 think I would point to my background and my work as a  
24 facilitator and also as a nonprofit CEO. I would suggest  
25 and encourage an opening Commission retreat with all the



1 Commissioners to quickly build understanding and  
2 relationships amongst the Commissioners, and facilitate a  
3 sense of team amongst the Commissioners.

4 I think I've found that the more we can build  
5 relationships, build trust, get to know each other better,  
6 I think the more we're going to be willing to listen to  
7 each other, to understand each other, and to also see some  
8 other, different perspectives versus just immediately just  
9 saying you're this and you're that because of what your  
10 political beliefs may be.

11 I would also encourage continued team building  
12 and relationship building activities to reinforce the  
13 commitment and sense that the Commissioners are all a  
14 united team working towards a common goal. I believe that  
15 when most, if not all of the Commissioners across various  
16 political perspectives can maintain and model some level of  
17 cohesiveness, then I think it will lend greater credibility  
18 and assurance within the communities that the work is not  
19 polarized or hyperpartisan.

20 I think that becomes really important because how  
21 we model it, how we talk to each other, how we interact  
22 with each other I think sends messages to people as to  
23 whether or not they can trust what we're doing, how we're  
24 doing it, and whether or not the end product is something  
25 that they, too, can believe it. That it is something that

1 was very carefully thought through and taking into the  
2 account many, many different diverse perspectives.

3 And I will also -- I believe that I'll also draw  
4 upon my values and belief in fairness, and equity, and high  
5 quality work, and the behaviors that result from that,  
6 those beliefs and values, such as open-mindedness,  
7 curiosity, and the quest to discern fact from fiction, to  
8 avoid perceptions of political bias and conflict. I think,  
9 to me, that's really important.

10 The Commission would have a really important task  
11 and I believe that being able to ensure that it could be  
12 done as best as possible in a way that would be seen as  
13 being free of a bias would be, I think, a really important  
14 goal that we should all work together towards.

15 And lastly, and as importantly I would advocate a  
16 push for transparency. And regular, and if possible,  
17 frequent communication with communities and stakeholders.  
18 I think it's important that they also understand what we're  
19 doing and what we're going through so that they can be  
20 brought along on the journey that the Commission is going  
21 to be on to ensure a fair and equitable redistricting  
22 process. And for me, I think that that's going to be a  
23 really important part of ensuring that we would not be seen  
24 as being hyperpartisan or politically biased.

25 MR. DAWSON: Thank you. Question three. What is

1 the greatest problem the Commission could encounter, and  
2 what actions would you take to avoid or respond to this  
3 problem?

4 MS. AKUTAGAWA: For me, I mean there's a lot of  
5 different things that I think that could be encountered.  
6 But I think for me what really struck me the most is that  
7 communities don't trust the Commission and eventually the  
8 end product.

9 I think referring back to your hyperpartisan  
10 question, I think that there is a real suspicion of  
11 government, but also about what government entities are  
12 producing. And that's where I think being able to discern  
13 fact from fiction is going to be important.

14 But more importantly, to be able to help provide  
15 a way in which the communities that we'll be representing  
16 and working with can trust in what we as a Commission would  
17 be doing. I think it's important to be fair, to care, to  
18 be inclusive, and to be also common sense.

19 So, the actions that I would take to try to avoid  
20 those problems I think first starts with communication.  
21 It's communication, communication, communication. And as I  
22 just mentioned previously, I would advocate a push for as  
23 much transparency as we can legally provide. I would also  
24 push for and advocate for regular and, if possible,  
25 frequent communication with communities and stakeholders.

1 I think the more people feel like they're being informed,  
2 that they're kept engaged, and that they're being brought  
3 along, I think that way then there's less likelihood of  
4 misinformation being pushed, misinformation being shared.

5 I would also advise that the Commission identify  
6 and get to know key influencers in various communities.  
7 Ensure that they, too, are kept up to date and informed of  
8 the work and progress of the Commission. I think that that  
9 will also be an important way of ensuring not only more  
10 trust, but also, hopefully, less likelihood of perceptions  
11 and charges of hyperpartisanship and political bias.

12 And lastly, I think it would be important for us  
13 to create commitment and the sense Commissioners are all a  
14 united team. Again, I think if we're seen as being at  
15 cross-purposes, then that is going to create I think the  
16 kind of the foil for distrust amongst all the communities  
17 that will be relying on us. And I think that's where it's  
18 important that we come together as a united group.

19 And I believe that when most, if not all of the  
20 Commissioners across various political perspectives can  
21 maintain and model this level, or some level of  
22 cohesiveness, then it will lend greater credibility and  
23 assurance within the communities that the work can be  
24 trusted.

25 MR. DAWSON: Thank you. Question four. If you

1 are selected, you will be one of 14 members of the  
2 Commission which is charged with working together to create  
3 maps of the new districts. Please describe a situation  
4 where you had to work collaboratively with others on a  
5 project to achieve a common goal.

6 Tell us the goal of the project, what your role  
7 in the group was, and how the group worked through any  
8 conflicts that arose.

9 What lessons would you take from this group  
10 experience to the Commission if selected?

11 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, I have two examples that I  
12 want to share with you. The first example is using my role  
13 as the CEO of my organization. We recently underwent a  
14 strategic planning process and together with our leadership  
15 team on staff, and our board of directors we underwent  
16 essentially a year and a half long process to determine and  
17 to develop this strategic plan.

18 We worked with a consultant. But we also had a  
19 strategic plan committee of the board that also helped with  
20 the -- with guiding and representing the board's  
21 perspective, and working with myself and two of my  
22 executive team members to produce, eventually, what would  
23 be our strategic plan for the next three years.

24 And so, my role in the group or in this  
25 particular project was both as the lead staff person, as

1 the CEO, but also working as that representative to the  
2 board as well, too, and interacting and liaising with the  
3 board committee. And I believe, I described myself, and I  
4 think I described this in my application as well, too, I  
5 feel that I'm the fulcrum. I'm the one that creates that  
6 balance between the board and the staff. And it's a --  
7 just being able to undergo that kind of process is  
8 interesting.

9           This is my third strategic plan, but this year  
10 was the most interesting in the sense that this was the  
11 greatest level of engagement that I've had from the board  
12 and it was great in the sense that they were much more  
13 invested in being able to provide input in what they wanted  
14 to see in the strategic plan. Interestingly, in the  
15 previous years there's been some engagement, but not to the  
16 level that we had this year.

17           And I will say that there were some, perhaps,  
18 rough spots that had come up during the course of the  
19 planning phases that we had. I think there were some  
20 disagreements in both approach, but also in terms of some  
21 of the conclusions that we had. And at times it was from  
22 my staff side, at times it was from the board's side. At  
23 times it was a result of our consultant.

24           And I believe that I was the one in the middle,  
25 or at least that's the role that I chose to take is the one

1 in the middle, ensuring that all sides were being heard.  
2 That we were coming together, having conversations. At  
3 times it also meant that I had to have one-on-one  
4 conversations with staff, with the consultant, with the  
5 board, and then having joint conversations where  
6 appropriate, and then having a larger conversation with the  
7 board committee, the consultant, and the staff to be able  
8 to resolve and come to a place that we were all agreeable  
9 to, that we all felt that we could be comfortable with.

10 And I think a lot of it was centered around the  
11 idea that we all had a common goal that what we're doing,  
12 what we're trying to do is what's best for the  
13 organization. And I think that that common goal makes  
14 things easier.

15 And there were times when there were compromises.  
16 There were times when it was more a matter of clarification  
17 of what was meant on one group's perspective over another  
18 group's perspective. I think eventually what we ended up  
19 with is a product that we're comfortable with, that we can  
20 all feel that we can very proudly stand behind. And so,  
21 for that, that's something that I feel like I've really  
22 taken a -- I continue to learn from these kinds of  
23 opportunities in terms of working with people with  
24 different interests, different agendas, different  
25 perspectives, but we all share a common goal.

1 I want to share another project example in which  
2 -- it's a little bit different from my organization, but  
3 it's related to my organization. So, as CEO of my  
4 organization, my nonprofit organization, I'm also part of  
5 coalitions and partnerships with other organizations. And  
6 there's this one in particular called the Alliance for  
7 Board Diversity. It's a national collaboration of four  
8 diverse leadership organizations, which includes my  
9 organization representing Asian and Pacific Islanders,  
10 along with organizations representing Black African  
11 Americans, Hispanic Latinos, and women.

12 And around this particular project what we're  
13 trying to do is to advocate for greater diversity on  
14 Fortune 500 corporate boards. And within that this year,  
15 the last -- I'm in my second year right now. My role is as  
16 Chair of this Alliance for Board Diversity.

17 Now, this is an all-volunteer group. It's not a  
18 formally constructed partnership, or collaboration, or  
19 organization. It is an informal organization of our four  
20 organizations, and all working together to move towards  
21 this larger goal of seeing greater diversity on corporate  
22 boards.

23 And so, as part of it we also have a partnership  
24 with Deloitte Consulting, and around--partnering around a  
25 research report that we, every two years, put out together,



1 jointly. And recently there were some conflicts that arose  
2 in regards to some perceptions of not respecting the terms  
3 of the agreement that our organizations have with them.  
4 And we recently had a joint meeting with all of our  
5 organizations and Deloitte.

6           What was interesting is each of the different  
7 organizations, the partner organizations, had a different  
8 perspective on the situation related to this conflict that  
9 was perceived with Deloitte. And some organizations were  
10 in different places. Other organizations were in  
11 completely other places. Partly because we all have  
12 different relationships individually with Deloitte. Some  
13 were we don't care. Let's just tell them what's wrong, why  
14 we're bothered. Others were let's be more careful. I  
15 don't think that there's any harm meant on their end.  
16 Others were, well, we need to say something, but we just  
17 need to be careful about how we go about saying it.

18           So, the joint meeting that we had with them  
19 recently was the solution. What we did is we ended up  
20 taking on a little bit softer, somewhat more indirect  
21 approach to addressing the conflict.

22           And my role was to balance the needs and  
23 interests of all the other three organizations to ensure  
24 that their needs were all met, but at the same time  
25 addressing or at least informing and bringing up with

1 Deloitte that there was an issue that came up that was  
2 really bothering the partners. And so, it was a difficult  
3 conversation. But all in all, working together with  
4 another partner, my partner and I were able to  
5 diplomatically bring up the issue and have a discussion  
6 that then led to, I believe, a resolution that I think  
7 satisfied all of us.

8           And so, I believe that that's an approach that I  
9 would also bring to the Commission as well, to -- I'm more  
10 than happy to have difficult conversations, but I also  
11 believe that working together, in partnership with  
12 everybody collaboratively will end us -- will take us to a  
13 place where I think we can continue to work more  
14 effectively together.

15           MS. PELLMAN: A quick time check, you have four  
16 minutes, 30 seconds.

17           MR. DAWSON: Thank you.

18           MS. AKUTAGAWA: Okay.

19           MR. DAWSON: Question five. A considerable  
20 amount of the Commission's work will involve meeting people  
21 from all over California who come from very different  
22 backgrounds and a wide variety of perspectives.

23           If you are selected as a Commissioner, what  
24 skills and attributes will make you effective at  
25 interacting with people from different backgrounds and who

1 have a variety of perspectives?

2           What experiences have you had that will help you  
3 be effective at understanding and appreciating people and  
4 communities of different backgrounds and who have a variety  
5 of perspectives?

6           MS. AKUTAGAWA: I'll repeat some of the ones that  
7 I've said before that I think are important for  
8 Commissioners to have. I think if I'm selected as a  
9 Commissioners, I think some of the skills and attributes  
10 that I would bring in interacting with people from  
11 different backgrounds, and who have a wide variety of  
12 perspectives are I think my -- the ability to be open-  
13 minded and having an appreciation for our state's diverse  
14 demographics, and geography, and my knowledge of  
15 California, as well as my curiosity about people. I think  
16 I -- every one of us has something interesting to share,  
17 has interesting backgrounds and stories, and I'm always  
18 curious as to what makes people tick. And I'm interesting  
19 in hearing their stories.

20           I think in terms of the experiences that I've  
21 had, I wrote on my application that I'm a lifelong native  
22 Californian. I was born and raised here in Southern  
23 California. I went to school here. I got my college  
24 degree here. I've lived my adult life here. And I  
25 oftentimes felt that growing up as a minority within a

1 minority, California was a different place. I often felt  
2 that my voice as an Asian American, as well as I think for  
3 other diverse Californians as well, too, was regularly  
4 erased, or rendered invisible, and oftentimes counted  
5 really for nothing. We were certainly not oftentimes cited  
6 in terms surveys, and polls that often that were put in  
7 place.

8           Today, I know California is in a very different  
9 place. Diversity is one of our state's greatest strengths.  
10 And I think ensuring that our diversity is reflected and  
11 honored in our civic and political process, including a  
12 commission like the Redistricting Commission is important  
13 in terms of fair and equal representation, and ensuring  
14 that our perspectives are reflected.

15           And I grew up in the working class suburbs of the  
16 San Gabriel Valley. And there, growing up, it was not the  
17 kind of community that it is now. It was a majority  
18 Mexican American kind of community, working class white.  
19 And I felt a very strong affinity with all of my friends  
20 who were, at the time, Mexican American and white, with  
21 very little Asians. Although now, it's a very different  
22 kind of place.

23           But I think what also has helped is that my  
24 immigrant father has instilled in me a broader appreciation  
25 of California's diverse landscape. And so, I really very

1 much look fondly on some our family road trips across all  
2 regions of California during my formative years. And as a  
3 student at Cal State L.A., I saw that it was an environment  
4 that the diversity of a student body was reflective of the  
5 changing demographics. And I lived and worked for nearly  
6 two years in San Diego.

7           Today, I'm leading a nonprofit organization. I  
8 travel all across the state. And I feel that it exposes me  
9 to the demographic, geographic, and economic diversity of  
10 California.

11           I'm working with people from corporate leadership  
12 all the way to student activists, who are coming from  
13 working class and other low-income backgrounds. And really  
14 just, you know, just being able to work across all  
15 different kind of economic sectors.

16           I've had the fortunate privilege of being able to  
17 participate in programs through Asian American Advancing  
18 Justice, a program called Leadership Development --

19           MS. PELLMAN: Thirty seconds remaining.

20           MS. AKUTAGAWA: -- and Interactive Relations,  
21 The California Connections Program, and also on Southern  
22 California Edison's Consumer Advisory Panel has really  
23 helped to expose me to a broad range of different people.

24           MR. DAWSON: All right, thank you. We're going  
25 to now go to Panel questions. Each of the Panel Members

1 will have 20 minutes to ask his or her questions. And  
2 we'll start with the Chair, Ms. Dickison.

3 CHAIR DICKISON: Good afternoon, Ms. Akutagawa.  
4 So, I was looking at your diversity -- or, your essay on  
5 impartiality and you talked about your experience as a  
6 member of Southern California Edison's Consumer Advisory  
7 Panel, and how it challenged you to listen to and consider  
8 opposing opinions and perspectives, and reconcile it with  
9 the needs of the company and the larger customer.

10 Could you provide an example of a time that you  
11 changed your mind after considering certain information  
12 when participating on this panel?

13 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Thanks for asking that question.  
14 I think I would -- we were presented often with a lot of  
15 different aspects of the Southern California Edison  
16 business. And one of the -- I think one of the -- I would  
17 say one of the issues that really sticks in my mind even  
18 today is really thinking about how Edison -- Edison's  
19 relationship with what they would call, I guess it's like  
20 the future grid. You know, the way the new, I guess  
21 electricity, and what's that going to mean in terms of the  
22 way that they're going to deliver electricity.

23 What was really interesting is being able to see  
24 from their perspective how they've been also able to shift  
25 to the use of -- or leveraging solar energy. I guess I

1 always thought solar energy was -- it would be something  
2 that would be good, but I didn't really see how it aligned  
3 with the Southern California Edison energy kind of plan.  
4 And it was interesting to see how they explained how  
5 they're able to -- I guess they're not the generators,  
6 necessarily, so it would be -- I'm doing a terrible job,  
7 actually, of explaining it. But just the way they  
8 explained it that eventually they're going to be able to  
9 have people, if they have solar panels, the company is  
10 going to be able to draw upon those solar panels as part of  
11 their energy transmission.

12           It was very interesting in the sense that there  
13 were some different perspectives on how solar energy would  
14 be used. I think it was just seen as something that would  
15 be -- something that would be detrimental to the company,  
16 even though there is a move towards nontraditional  
17 electrical generation.

18           And being able to understand that and hearing  
19 from different people who had different perspectives around  
20 the role of solar energy, as well as other green energy  
21 uses was pretty interesting for me, as somebody who wasn't  
22 very well versed in it. And I'll be honest, even though I  
23 have concerns about being much more environmental friendly,  
24 I'm also -- I also thought about how is this going to help  
25 us because not everybody is going to be able to afford

1 solar energy, and the kind of programs, and I think other  
2 perspectives -- or, more programs to help bring these  
3 opportunities to more people are things that I'm watching  
4 with interest now.

5 CHAIR DICKISON: Okay, thank you. So, you've  
6 been working at LEAP, Leadership Education for Asian  
7 Pacifics since 1992?

8 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Yes.

9 CHAIR DICKISON: Can you tell me a little bit  
10 about LEAP? I'm not really that familiar with it.

11 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Sure. So, we are a leadership  
12 development organization founded to, as I like to say,  
13 grow, develop and uncap the talent of Asian American,  
14 Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander leaders that I  
15 believe is in all of our community members.

16 I like to say that the work that we do spans from  
17 the classroom to the boardroom across various life stages.  
18 And a lot of the work that we primarily are doing is  
19 helping people transition from one life stage to the next.

20 So, we're working with students in college  
21 transition into their first jobs, their early career jobs.  
22 We're working with people who have been working in their  
23 roles, whether it's in corporations, nonprofits, higher  
24 education institutions, government sector roles, working,  
25 transitioning from their early career roles to mid-career.



1 And then, from mid-career roles to transitioning more into  
2 executive level roles.

3 We believe that that's where our sweet spot has  
4 been in terms of being able to help people really find how  
5 they can best be effective as leaders within the kind of  
6 roles that they are now, but more importantly what they  
7 could do when they -- as they look towards their next step  
8 in their career.

9 CHAIR DICKISON: And you do that through  
10 training, advocacy, both?

11 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, our work is primarily  
12 leadership development programming. We do multiple-day  
13 programs that are integrated, and really helping people to  
14 discover themselves. And all of our programming is from an  
15 Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander cultural lens.  
16 Really helping them to discover how they can be their most  
17 authentic self as a leader.

18 And so we have multiple-day programs, as I  
19 mentioned, that are integrated across days, as well as over  
20 several months. We do cohort-driven programs. And then,  
21 we also provide workshops that are half-day, one-day. And  
22 then we also do a lot of educational work in terms of  
23 presentations about Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders,  
24 as well, too, in terms of depending on what an organization  
25 or a client may want from us.

1           In this time of COVID-19, we're also doing a lot  
2 of work to help keep our community members connected  
3 together. So, what we're providing is virtual  
4 conversations based around themes that people are  
5 interested in. And really, just trying to provide  
6 opportunities for what I would call mental resiliency.

7           I think right now we're all working at home. We  
8 have our families in some cases, for those who are  
9 fortunate to have families with them. People may have  
10 coworkers if they are working remotely. But I know that  
11 over the course of the day as I think about how we just  
12 normally go about our days we oftentimes interact with  
13 people, and we don't have that. So, right now, random  
14 people, you know, just someone that we might run into that  
15 we know at lunch, or somebody we'll know -- we'll meet for  
16 the first time. Those little kinds of interactions are  
17 something that we're trying to replicate right now.

18           And so, we're pivoting in terms of being able to  
19 provide something for our community while we're in this  
20 moment of COVID-19.

21           And so, it's also helping us to shift in terms of  
22 the kind of programming that we'll be providing, hopefully,  
23 to more people, but a lot of our work is face to face. And  
24 again, really trying to help people discover and really  
25 leverage their most authentic selves from the cultural

1 perspective, either as someone who's Asian American or  
2 Pacific Islander.

3 CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. So, based on the  
4 work that you do with LEAP, what skill sets do you think  
5 would translate and assist you in connecting with  
6 communities throughout the state in the work of the  
7 Commission?

8 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Well, I think for me, in terms of  
9 the work that I do, a lot of what I do is the leadership  
10 development. I think really helping people to discover  
11 their best self in terms of their best and most authentic  
12 self.

13 I think also what I would be able to do, and I  
14 think this is normally just how I operate, is I'm curious  
15 about people. I think the work that I do is centered  
16 around that curiosity of people, both in terms of knowing  
17 them, but also I would consider myself to a degree an  
18 educator, as well, too, and helping people to understand my  
19 communities.

20 And so, I think that that kind of back and forth  
21 and being able to have exchanges, and to learn from each  
22 other is something that I think is something that I would  
23 bring to the Commission.

24 And I think with that comes with -- with that,  
25 also, an open-mindedness. Because I think as I'm curious

1 about people I try really hard not to go in with a  
2 preformed notion.

3           And I had actually a moment, this happened about  
4 a couple years ago. I travel around the country for the  
5 work that I do, delivering -- I deliver training, as well  
6 as just running my organization. Part of what I do is I  
7 deliver training as well, too. And so, I've been  
8 facilitating for close to 30 years, now. And a couple  
9 years ago I had the chance to do some work at NASA in  
10 Florida. And again, I just take people at who they are, at  
11 least that's what I try my best to do. And there was -- I  
12 was there for two consecutive days. And each day I was  
13 having lunch with the people that I was working with. They  
14 were in the diversity and inclusion area, and so we would  
15 have lunch together. And we would just have conversations,  
16 I think just normal conversations, every-day conversations  
17 that I think people who are just breaking bread would do.

18           And it was on the second day and one of the --  
19 one of the individuals who I was sitting and having lunch  
20 with made a comment that it was interesting to me. She  
21 goes, oh, you know, this has been really nice. I just  
22 didn't expect that. I thought because you're from  
23 California, I thought you would be different. And I  
24 thought, oh, I never thought about that I would be  
25 different. I just thought we're just people and I never

1 thought about it in this kind of way.

2 But it struck me that they must have thought or  
3 had some preformed notions about me. Maybe because of my  
4 ethnicity, maybe because I'm a woman, maybe, obviously  
5 because I'm from California. But I think just in having  
6 just the kind of normal conversation I think they were able  
7 to realize that. I'm as much a normal person as they are,  
8 as well, too, and I think we found commonalities.

9 CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. So, in a lot of your  
10 work you've advocated for Asians and Pacific Islanders.  
11 What do you see as the Commission's role in advocacy?

12 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Well, yeah, a lot of my role is  
13 advocating for the Asian and Pacific Islander communities.  
14 And I would say that that's probably my primary focus.

15 I will also say that I'm an advocate for all  
16 diverse communities as well, too. I think that we are only  
17 as strong as all of us standing together.

18 And I think in terms of the Commission and its  
19 role in advocacy, you know, advocacy is -- at least for me  
20 it's a little bit of a loaded work. I think it depends on  
21 what you mean by advocacy.

22 There's advocacy as in I'm going to lobby for one  
23 position or one perspective, only. Or, advocacy could also  
24 mean that I'm here to represent the viewpoint of a group of  
25 people or groups of people, but at the same time to ensure

1 that their perspectives are not overlooked, or ignored, or  
2 left out, but not at the cost of marginalizing another  
3 group.

4 And so for me, it's more advocacy in the latter  
5 way that I think in terms of the Commission's role advocacy  
6 is to ensure that all of the diverse communities within  
7 California are included in this whole entire process. That  
8 their needs are also considered very seriously.

9 And I know we have so much diversity. And even  
10 within the larger diverse groups there's even more levels  
11 of diversity. I'll just use the Asian American community  
12 as an example. I know it's easy sometimes for people think  
13 that we're monolithically all the same. You know, the  
14 stereotypes about us as being the model minority is pretty  
15 common in terms of the work that I do and what I hear.

16 But we're also a community that when I present  
17 and talk to others who are interested in learning more  
18 about the Asian American community I speak to them and I  
19 say, you know, one of the first things I say is we are a  
20 community of extremes and we have a lot of diversity. But  
21 oftentimes people see just one end, which is we're very  
22 wealthy, and well-educated. But we have everybody in  
23 between and we have also a significant portion that are  
24 struggling, that are not as well educated, that are not as  
25 wealthy, and have great needs, but oftentimes may be

1 overlooked.

2           And so, and I know that's the same in the other  
3 diverse communities as well, too. And so, I think our role  
4 as a Commission is to ensure that all of those different  
5 perspectives, and advocating for all of the communities  
6 that may be overlooked or marginalized are going to be  
7 brought in.

8           CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you.

9           MS. PELLMAN: We have three minutes, 42 seconds  
10 remaining.

11           CHAIR DICKISON: So, the first eight members of  
12 the Commission are selected randomly and then they are  
13 tasked with selecting the next six. If you're one of the  
14 first eight, what would you be looking for in those final  
15 six Commissioners?

16           MS. AKUTAGAWA: I think I would like to know just  
17 what the first eight Commissioners would bring. And I  
18 would like to look for Commissioners that would help to  
19 balance out and can complement the skill sets, and the  
20 competencies, and the attributes of the -- of the eight  
21 that have already been randomly selected.

22           I think the more balance and the more well-  
23 rounded group that we can have, then the likelier, then,  
24 that we're going to have a product, you know, end result  
25 that is going to be again, I think, not only much stronger,

1 but the likelihood is one that will be seen as both  
2 credible, and sound, and legally defensible as well, too.

3 I think that I will also acknowledge, having done  
4 the work that I've done that diverse team can bring  
5 conflict with it, but I think if there are ways in which we  
6 can find how we can all find that common ground, I think  
7 we're going to come out better together for having  
8 complementary, but diverse skill sets on the Commission.

9 CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. I don't have further  
10 questions at this time. So, I'm going to turn it over to  
11 Mr. Belnap for his 20 minutes.

12 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank  
13 you for being with us. I want to follow up on a few of  
14 your answers today, mostly because I'm curious and just to  
15 fill in a few blanks for me.

16 You've said a couple times that you're a minority  
17 within a minority. What do you mean by that?

18 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, and I would say so I grew up  
19 here in California. And the California today is a very  
20 different California from when I was growing up. I grew up  
21 in the San Gabriel Valley and I was the -- we were the only  
22 -- my family was the only Asian family in the region that  
23 -- at least -- and when I call region, I mean literally as  
24 I think about being, you know, a child in the area I grew  
25 up in. Within the blocks that I lived in we were the only,



1 really, Asian family in the nearby area. And everybody  
2 else around me was Mexican American. And I tell people,  
3 it's like I very specifically say Mexican American because  
4 at the time when I was growing up everybody was Mexican  
5 American. There was not the kind of Latino diversity that  
6 I think we have now. And we also had white working class  
7 folks as well, too.

8           And growing up through, just through K through  
9 12, high school, and even to a degree maybe even into  
10 college. But more just thinking about growing up into high  
11 school I used to look at the yard signs for local city  
12 council elections, for mayor, and I was an avid reader, so  
13 even in junior high and high school I would regularly read  
14 the newspaper to just understand what's going on around me.  
15 And I always noted with interest that whenever there were  
16 polls taken in the State of California, especially the exit  
17 polls or other kinds of polls about what do people in  
18 California think I always noted that there was always  
19 black, Hispanic, and white on the kind of polling numbers  
20 that they collected, but never any polling on Asians.

21           And within that I realized that I was part of a  
22 demographic in the state that didn't have a voice. And we  
23 were a minority within the minority group.

24           And today it's a little bit different, I think,  
25 now, but it is different, but it isn't different. So,

1 Asian Americans now make up the second largest minority  
2 group in the State of California after Latinos. But, yet,  
3 it still is interesting to me that polls could be conducted  
4 in the State of California and there is not an Asian  
5 American perspective reflected. It's not every time, but I  
6 do see it once in a while. And I think it's interesting  
7 that in a state that has nearly 15 percent Asians, and  
8 Asian population in the State of California that they  
9 couldn't find enough to, you know, get polling numbers on.

10 And so, it's just interesting to me. I think  
11 that's why I speak about being a minority within a  
12 minority. And I think that that has influenced me in terms  
13 of the way I see the world, the way I do my work, the way  
14 in which I feel like when there are minority perspectives  
15 even within the larger Asian community, I feel it's  
16 important to ensure that other minority voices are -- are  
17 at least encouraged to be included, to speak up. And also,  
18 cognizant of my role that when I've in more diverse spaces,  
19 too, that I have to speak up as well, too, and to be able  
20 to provide at least a perspective as well.

21 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Thank you. I'm also curious,  
22 in your answer to question four you talked about an issue  
23 related to Deloitte and a coalition that had been put  
24 together. So, what was the issue related to Deloitte that  
25 was bothering some of the partners in the coalition?

1 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, yeah, thank you for asking  
2 that. I didn't know how much detail to give. So, we have  
3 an agreement between the four partners and Deloitte, so we  
4 jointly put together a research report that looks at --  
5 it's a census of Fortune 500 board directors that are  
6 African American, Hispanic, Asian, and women, and Deloitte  
7 is our partner in terms of gathering some level of data,  
8 and then our group each do some additional level of data  
9 verification.

10 And as part of that project, we've been -- we're  
11 in our second iteration with, second I guess round with  
12 Deloitte. And as part of the agreement one of the things  
13 that our four partner organizations were very specific  
14 about saying is that should any partner want to utilize the  
15 joint data that they do need to notify the other partners  
16 and let us know.

17 What had happened is that we had a point of  
18 conflict between our four organizations and Deloitte around  
19 including in this census report our recommendations for  
20 what companies could do to increase diversity or to get  
21 more diverse board members onto their board. And in this  
22 particular case Deloitte was very adamant that they did not  
23 want to include those recommendations in our census report.  
24 So, we thought, okay, then we'll just do the census report  
25 and our four organizations as a Joint Alliance for Board

1 Diversity will just issue our own separate report with our  
2 recommendations.

3           We were getting ready to do so. We had been  
4 trying to notify Deloitte that we were going to be coming  
5 out with that. And we were getting ready to do so and they  
6 then notified us that they are coming out with their own  
7 version of the recommendations in partnership with a  
8 completely different organization, referring to our data,  
9 not giving us really any kind of credit other than a very  
10 small line embedded within a very dense press release.

11           And you could imagine that the partners were not  
12 too happy, particularly the lead research organization  
13 partner on this, and they were not too happy to see that  
14 the work that we had done had been taken advantage of, and  
15 especially because they were the ones that were the reason  
16 that we did not go out with that in our joint report.

17           And so, we had to have a conversation with the  
18 lead partner from Deloitte about it. Each of the other  
19 organizations, they all have varying relationships with  
20 Deloitte, so there was some desire to preserve that  
21 relationship.

22           And even though my organization doesn't have a  
23 relationship with Deloitte, I still have to keep into  
24 account the needs of my other three partners, and we wanted  
25 to find a way in which we can successfully resolve this

1 without blowing the entire relationship. And so, I think  
2 we were able to do that. There's still some grumbling, but  
3 I think for the most part people are satisfied that we had  
4 our say, the lead partner was put on notice that what we  
5 agreed upon was not followed, and that we'll see what's  
6 going to happen going forward. But she is aware that we  
7 were pretty unhappy about what had happened.

8 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Does the coalition provide --

9 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Maybe that was a little more,  
10 maybe more than you wanted to know.

11 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: No, that's what I wanted to  
12 know. Does the coalition provide funding for the research  
13 that Deloitte does or do you provide data?

14 MS. AKUTAGAWA: We provide data. So, we each are  
15 responsible -- so, there's no funding that's provided.  
16 Each organization I guess you could say provides our own  
17 resources from each of our organizations to conduct the  
18 work.

19 So, Deloitte does the initial round of data  
20 gathering and then that data is shared with each of our  
21 other organizations. And then what we do is data  
22 verification, and so, each of our teams are responsible for  
23 data verification. And then, Deloitte, once the data's  
24 revised or verified, then Deloitte is responsible for PR  
25 and the I guess the production of the final report that is

1 distributed.

2 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Okay, thank you. And one  
3 other follow-up question, so LEAP, the organization that  
4 you're CEO of, how does it get its funding?

5 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, we get our funding from  
6 various sources. We get corporate sponsorships, foundation  
7 funding, and individual donor, and also fee-for-service.  
8 So, what we do do is the leadership development programs  
9 that we provide, we have either straight fee-for-service  
10 relationships where a company will hire us to come in and  
11 provide leadership training for their employees or as part  
12 of the sponsorship packages that we have, or the  
13 sponsorship relationships we have with our sponsors we'll  
14 also include some of our leadership development programming  
15 as part of the sponsorship package option.

16 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Okay. Does LEAP engage in  
17 any legislative advocacy?

18 MS. AKUTAGAWA: No.

19 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Okay.

20 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Other than we're asked sometimes  
21 to sign onto a letter, we'll do that related to things that  
22 may be in alignment with either Asian American -- Asian or  
23 Pacific Islander community issues, or issues related to  
24 nonprofit organizations. But we do not do any lobbying,  
25 either in Sacramento or in Washington, D.C.

1           VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Okay, thank you. You've  
2 spent the majority of your professional career advocating  
3 for Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. I'd  
4 like you to provide us an example or an experience that you  
5 have had that would demonstrate to other ethnic communities  
6 that they should trust you to listen to their concerns, and  
7 advocate to them -- advocate for them, if warranted.

8           MS. AKUTAGAWA: Sure. So, I think one would be  
9 the Alliance for Board Diversity example. I did say that  
10 we don't lobby. I did, though, have the opportunity, for  
11 example, to testify before the House Financial Services  
12 Committee related to the Alliance for Board Diversity, and  
13 specifically around corporate board diversity.

14           I was there, though, in my role as Chair for the  
15 Alliance for Board Diversity. So, I was very cognizant of  
16 my role there as the Chair of the Alliance for Board  
17 Diversity, that I'm not there just to advocate for Asian  
18 Americans and Pacific Islanders, and having more from my  
19 community on corporate board.

20           I was very careful and I was also very much  
21 cognizant that I wanted to make sure that I equally  
22 represented a perspective that was representative of the  
23 black African American community, the Hispanic Latino  
24 community and then, of course the Asian and Pacific  
25 Islander community as well, too. And then, of course also

1 bringing in data or sharing data with the committee about  
2 the representation of women across all of those different  
3 ethnic communities.

4 I also have another example that I would give to  
5 you. I oftentimes partner with other, different ethnic  
6 communities, in particular in Southern California. Last  
7 year I had the opportunity to partner with the African  
8 American Board Leadership Institute, the California Latino  
9 Leadership Institute, the L.A. African American Women's  
10 Public Policy Institute, the Women's Business Enterprise  
11 Council, and also the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning  
12 Council.

13 And that was around an opportunity to get or  
14 educate our communities, our diverse communities around  
15 opportunities on state commissions, boards and commissions.  
16 And so, it did feature Assemblywoman Sydney Kamlager-Dove  
17 for that particular event.

18 But I work, I definitely look for ways and the  
19 Executive Director of the African American Board Leadership  
20 Institute and I, we oftentimes are looking for ways where  
21 we can partner together. We've had some other projects  
22 that we've tried doing some work on jointly, together.  
23 Some which don't always materialize because the funding  
24 doesn't come through. But where it is that we can, we do  
25 try to work together. And I believe that as much as I can,



1 I do try to advocate for other communities in addition to  
2 my own.

3 I believe that in terms of success for the Asian  
4 and Pacific Islander communities, I think we also need to  
5 advocate for others as well, too. Because I think, you  
6 know, we are here because others have done the same for us.  
7 I believe it's important that we do the same for others as  
8 well, too.

9 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Okay, thank you. One more  
10 question. Can you walk us through an example of an  
11 analysis you have performed where you had to compile and  
12 analyze data, and other information?

13 MS. PELLMAN: Time check, we have five minutes,  
14 20 seconds remaining.

15 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Okay. I think part -- one of the  
16 things -- oh, I guess I would -- I would point to, and I  
17 think I shared this in my application. I wrote -- I was  
18 asked to do a scholarly article in which I did have to  
19 gather data as well, too. I think in terms of -- I'll be  
20 honest, I think in terms of that one it's data that I was  
21 familiar with, but it was looking for data. And it was  
22 also a practitioner's point of view in terms of leadership  
23 in the Asian American community.

24 But I am oftentimes looking for and gathering  
25 data for the workshops and presentations that I give. In

1 that particular article, I was looking for representation  
2 of Asian Americans in different industry sectors, and  
3 looking at different sources. I will say that Google is  
4 awesome and it has helped a lot in terms of looking for the  
5 kind of data that may be out there.

6 If you're asking or if you're wondering do I do a  
7 lot of statistical analysis and things like that, I will  
8 say that that's not something that I do or have had a  
9 background in, in terms of my career. So, but I do look  
10 for regulatory, I think, data that will help to tell the  
11 story that I'm trying to tell. And, unfortunately,  
12 sometimes it's out there and sometimes it's not. And but I  
13 try as best as I can to ensure that what I'm trying to  
14 explain is also backed up by data as well, too. I just  
15 don't want to leave it to just it being my opinion.

16 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: Okay, thank you. Madam  
17 Chair, I have no further questions.

18 CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. We'll turn the time  
19 over, now, to Mr. Coe.

20 PANEL MEMBER COE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good  
21 afternoon, Ms. Akutagawa. Thank you for taking the time to  
22 speak with us today.

23 You serve on the boards of several organizations  
24 that advocate for the rights and advancement of the  
25 Asian/Pacific Islander community, as well as the

1 advancement of women. And I'm curious if you could tell us  
2 a little bit about your roles on those boards and also why  
3 you choose to serve on those boards?

4 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, I serve on -- I'll start with  
5 the Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council. I serve on  
6 that one. So, on pretty much all of them right now, partly  
7 also because of my role at my organization it's hard to  
8 take on something more than, other than being on that  
9 particular board.

10 But the APPPPCON, or A3PCON Board, that's one of  
11 my more recent ones that I serve on. I choose to serve on  
12 that one because it is an umbrella organization of all of  
13 the various Asian and Pacific Islander serving  
14 organizations in Southern California. It's one in which I  
15 believe it's important not only that I be involved in, but  
16 it would help to understand what the challenges, as well as  
17 the issues that other organizations and other communities  
18 in and around Southern California are facing.

19 I'm also on the board of the Asian and Asian  
20 American Institute at California State University Los  
21 Angeles. That one is -- I'm on that particular board  
22 mainly because it's my alma mater. And I'm trying to find  
23 a way in which I can give back more to the school. And the  
24 previous director was someone that I had gotten to know,  
25 and when she formed this organization or this institute she

1 asked me to serve on it.

2 She has since stepped down. There's a new person  
3 that's been on board. It's a little less active than it  
4 was previously and so, that one I still sit on, but we  
5 don't get together or meet as frequently as we had in the  
6 past, before that.

7 I also serve on the Asian Women's Leadership  
8 Network. It is a network of Asian women leaders. The  
9 intent when they originally started was to be a national  
10 network, but they're more right now of a network that is  
11 based in New York City. I am still committed to that  
12 particular organization. I served as a vice president on  
13 that network. But I remain committed to it mainly because  
14 of my relationship with the woman who's the president of  
15 that particular organization and I believe that it's  
16 important for me to support her, as well as support the  
17 organization.

18 I also serve on Japanese American Community  
19 Services. It is a community organization. And this is  
20 also something that I chose to serve on mainly because the  
21 bulk of my work, as you can see, is within a broader Pan  
22 Asian America community setting and I don't know as much  
23 within the Japanese American community, even though that's  
24 my ethnicity. And this was the one connection that I had  
25 in terms of serving in a capacity that helped or enabled me

1 to be engaged in a specifically Japanese American kind of  
2 setting.

3 I think I also mentioned that I have been on some  
4 other boards through Southern California Edison's Consumer  
5 Advisory Panel, which I am no longer on. It's been about,  
6 now, two and a half, three years when I was last on that  
7 board.

8 I am currently an appointee to the California  
9 Department of Insurance, their Insurance Diversity Task  
10 Force. And I served previously as the vice chair of the  
11 task force, but right now I am a member of the task force.

12 And the other perhaps two things that I would  
13 mention, it's not necessarily formally a board, but that  
14 would be the Alliance for Board Diversity. I'm currently  
15 serving as the chair of this national collaboration.

16 And then LEAP, the organization that I run is  
17 also involved in a partnership with the anti-defamation  
18 league in Southern California. They formed what's called  
19 the Asian Jewish Initiative, which is -- again, it's an  
20 informal coalitional partnership of various Asian American  
21 organizations, together with the ABL in terms of looking at  
22 areas of interest and being able to create relationships  
23 across our two communities.

24 PANEL MEMBER COE: Okay, thank you. In your  
25 essay on impartiality and the information you've given us

1 today, you spoke about your role and experience as CEO of a  
2 nonprofit, and your service on serving on some of these  
3 boards you've talked about as examples of times you've had  
4 to -- or roles in which you've had to make impartial  
5 decisions. I'm wondering if you can give us a specific  
6 example of a time where you had to make a difficult  
7 impartial decision that maybe involved setting aside your  
8 preference or your self-interest.

9 MS. AKUTAGAWA: I think I would -- well, one, I  
10 think I would point -- well, let me -- okay, I'll start  
11 with the Alliance for Board Diversity and I think I point  
12 to that because that's outside of my normal realm of work.  
13 I think that's one, again, in which I believe that in my  
14 role as the chair I need to be impartial and to ensure that  
15 when I speak, whether for example when it's -- when we  
16 released the report for media interviews, when I spoke in  
17 front of the House Financial Services Committee, I believe  
18 that those are times in which I needed to ensure that I be  
19 as fair and as impartial as possible in terms of not  
20 weighting -- or, giving greater weight to my organization  
21 and the Asian American community. Some people say that I  
22 should do that. You know, I should be advocating even more  
23 strongly given my role, but I do believe very strongly that  
24 if I'm there representing all of the other -- all four of  
25 our organizations I need to give equal weight to each of

1 the organizations. For me, I think that that's a really  
2 important of kind of my role that I have.

3 I would say that when I work in partnership with  
4 other diverse groups like, for example, when we were  
5 talking about the boards and commission education event  
6 that we did with the African American Board Leadership  
7 Institute, the California Latina Leadership Institute, the  
8 L.A. Women's Public Policy Institute, again I think it's  
9 really being able to ensure that we have equal  
10 representation of each of our diverse communities' voices  
11 that are represented as well, too.

12 Also, in the course of my work, I just thought of  
13 one other example that I'd like to give. So, in the course  
14 of my work we work in partnership with not only my Alliance  
15 for Board Diversity organization partners, but we also are  
16 involved with an annual event that we all do together with  
17 Morgan Stanley. It's a big, multicultural leader's  
18 conference.

19 And one of the things that we all play a role in  
20 is suggesting speakers, suggesting topics. And one of the  
21 things that I believe that I try to do is to ensure that  
22 when I see that there is a lack of representation of  
23 speakers from one of the other diverse communities, I try  
24 my best to think about and making suggestions for other  
25 diverse communities, and not just trying to put forth names

1 for the Asian American community. I think the purpose of  
2 these multicultural gatherings is so that we can hear from  
3 different people. So, I really try to keep in mind that if  
4 that's the case, then I don't want to make it just about  
5 Asian Americans, I don't want it to be just about African  
6 Americans. I want to see Latinos. I want to see other  
7 diverse speakers from other diverse communities involved in  
8 this as well, too. So, I take that role very seriously.  
9 And I know that, luckily, other partners are also doing the  
10 same as well, too so --

11 PANEL MEMBER COE: Thank you. In your first  
12 essay and a little bit so far in your discussion today,  
13 you've discussed that as a young person and as a minority  
14 within a minority that you saw engagement as something that  
15 was for other people, not people like you. That your voice  
16 as an Asian American, as well as those of other diverse  
17 Californians were regularly erased, rendered invisible, and  
18 counted for nothing.

19 One of the key objectives that the Commission  
20 will have to encounter is identifying communities of  
21 interest throughout the state, including those that may  
22 think similarly to how you viewed engagement as a young  
23 person.

24 So, having experienced that yourself, do you  
25 think that you would have a unique ability to reach out to



1 those communities that normally don't engage with  
2 government in order to encourage them to share their  
3 perspectives to better inform the Commission?

4 MS. AKUTAGAWA: I think that -- I'll be honest.  
5 I mean I'm not going to promise that I would be able to in  
6 every single case. I think that I can promise, though, is  
7 that I would ask the questions. I would advocate and  
8 strongly encourage that in cases where there are  
9 communities that are not being heard or that do feel like,  
10 yeah, they're not included.

11 And actually, one of the ones that I would  
12 probably point out that would most likely that would feel  
13 that way is the Native American community in California. I  
14 know that there are various Native American Tribes and  
15 Nations in California, but we don't oftentimes hear from  
16 them.

17 And whether or not I would be personally able to  
18 reach in to connect with them that would be hard to say. I  
19 have network that I could try to tap into to see if they  
20 could help me connect or help the Commission connect.  
21 Where I can, I would absolutely -- would try my best to  
22 ensure that we reach for all those communities. I think  
23 within the Asian American communities I would also -- or,  
24 actually, within the Asian American, and Native Hawaiian,  
25 and Pacific Islander communities, I think the communities

1 that I believe are oftentimes are overlooked and often, I  
2 know, feel very invisible are the Pacific Islander  
3 communities. And I think for that, those are ones in which  
4 I would definitely be able to draw from my network to  
5 ensure that their voices are also being heard as best as  
6 possible.

7 And I think there are challenges that make it  
8 difficult for these communities to be included, but I think  
9 as best as possible I think it's important that we try to  
10 make -- create the conditions by which they can also be  
11 engaged or included as well, too.

12 PANEL MEMBER COE: Thank you. I have a question  
13 kind of similar to one that Mr. Belnap asked earlier about  
14 you advocating for or representing different diverse  
15 groups. But I wanted to frame mine within the context of  
16 geography and the various regions throughout the State of  
17 California.

18 So, I see that you're from Orange County. So,  
19 I'd like for you to talk a little bit about your  
20 experiences in different parts of the state, the people  
21 you've met there, and what you've learned from these people  
22 about their needs, and their desires, and their preferences  
23 that would make you an effective representative for them on  
24 this Commission?

25 MS. AKUTAGAWA: So, let me start by saying I grew

1 up in the San Gabriel Valley or East L.A. My office is in  
2 downtown L.A., in Little Tokyo. I live in Huntington  
3 Beach. I lived for a period of time in San Diego. And I  
4 have family members on both my side and my husband's side  
5 in Northern California, spread out from the East Bay all  
6 the way through, down to the South Bay in the Peninsula.  
7 And so, I just have people spread out all over the place.

8           And currently, right now my nephew and his wife  
9 are emergency room doctors in Visalia, so I now have a  
10 personal connection to Central California as well, too.

11           And so, I think that was part of what I meant in  
12 my essay answers about just having that kind of extensive  
13 connection across all of those different regions.

14           I think San Diego's a very different place now,  
15 than when I was living there almost 30 years ago. And it's  
16 interesting remembering making the drive from Southern L.A.  
17 to San Diego because I would work in San Diego, but then I  
18 would come home on weekends to be at home, see my friends,  
19 see my family. My work takes me all across the California  
20 region.

21           But I do want to point out, too, one thing. And  
22 I think, so because of that it's really interesting, I feel  
23 like I think for me, being able to move through all of  
24 these different geographic regions seems normal. But I  
25 will say that sometimes I'm surprised that there are people

1 who never leave a very finite region. There are people  
2 that I know who live in the South Bay of Southern  
3 California and literally never leave that particular area.  
4 Or, they've grown up in Orange County and have never gone  
5 more than 5 miles up the 405 to somewhere.

6 And the thing I would see in the South Bay, as  
7 well, too, and so -- or, in Northern California. But this  
8 part of perhaps who I am. I'm curious, I want to know. My  
9 husband and I, we spent time in the Central Coast, as well,  
10 too, partly because of my dog. She freaks out at  
11 fireworks, so we make it a point to drive to Monterey so  
12 that we're spending some time there. And I know it speaks  
13 to a privilege that I have to be able to drive up there.  
14 It just alleviates her and it alleviates us.

15 But it enables me to see, as we drive through the  
16 regions, the different geographies of California. And one  
17 of the most impactful experiences that I had, that I think  
18 really helped me to -- that helped me to gain a better  
19 appreciation for the Central Valley that I don't think I  
20 had, other than driving through it, was a California  
21 Connections Program that I did through the Southern  
22 California Leadership Network.

23 And it was a California wide program. We went to  
24 San Diego, we were in Southern California, but it was  
25 really the visits and the meetings that we had with

1 farmers, and with the military folks there, with small  
2 business people, and educational leaders in the Central  
3 Valley that really gave me a different depth appreciation  
4 for what the Central Valley is grappling with, and how  
5 different it can be from the -- I would say Southern  
6 California, San Diego, and the Northern California, San  
7 Francisco Bay Area kind of issues.

8           And it's really just amazing that in our state we  
9 have that kind of diversity that we have from farmland, to  
10 the urban landscapes, to the cities, to the suburbs to, you  
11 know, everything and anything in between. And So, I think  
12 for me that's what makes California fabulous, but it's also  
13 what is going to make California complicated.

14           And that's why I think, you know, to me having  
15 that kind of long-standing knowledge about California  
16 becomes important because over the last ten years there has  
17 been quite a bit of change. And I think for anybody who  
18 would be serving on the Commission, I think needs to have a  
19 perspective that is rooted in really having some of that  
20 understanding of the kind of both geographic changes, and  
21 what's been wrought in all of our different geographies,  
22 but also the demographic changes as well, too.

23           PANEL MEMBER COE: Thank you. Could I get a time  
24 check, please?

25           MS. PELLMAN: Yes, we only have one minute, 30

1 seconds remaining.

2 PANEL MEMBER COE: Okay, great. No further  
3 questions at this time, Madam Chair.

4 CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you. Mr. Dawson?

5 MR. DAWSON: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank  
6 you, Ms. Akutagawa. Actually, I was going to ask you about  
7 the California connection thing, so you anticipated my  
8 question.

9 I did want to ask you about you, in addition to  
10 your leadership of LEAP, you are on many boards. One, two,  
11 three, four, boards I count in your activities. How will  
12 you balance your work on the Commission, if selected, with  
13 your professional and board commitments?

14 MS. PELLMAN: Mr. Dawson, just a quick time  
15 check. We have five minutes remaining of the total 90.

16 MR. DAWSON: Thank you.

17 MS. AKUTAGAWA: I would say that of the boards  
18 that I have, the Alliance for Board Diversity I will be  
19 stepping down as the chair as of January 2021, so my time  
20 is coming to an end on that particular one.

21 In terms of my role on the other boards, I  
22 mentioned that the Asian and Asian American Institute Board  
23 that one is fairly low key, probably meet once a year, now.  
24 The Japanese American Community Services that meets, I  
25 would say probably once every other month right now, but I

1 don't anticipate that becoming a problem. We usually meet  
2 by phone.

3 And in terms of the California Department of  
4 Insurance, we do meet quarterly, but I'd have the option of  
5 meeting by phone on that one as well, too.

6 The Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council one  
7 that does meet on a monthly basis. But that one I think  
8 they would see my service, if I were to be selected on the  
9 Commission, as something that would be in which would be  
10 seen as beneficial. So, I could either speak to them about  
11 taking a leave of absence or depending on how they would  
12 feel, perhaps just allowing me to miss some of the monthly  
13 meetings depending on the intensity of the meeting  
14 schedule.

15 MR. DAWSON: All right, thank you.

16 I have no further follow up, Madam Chair, if  
17 there are any follow ups from the Panel.

18 CHAIR DICKISON: I do not have any follow ups.

19 Mr. Belnap?

20 VICE CHAIR BELNAP: I do not.

21 CHAIR DICKISON: Mr. Coe?

22 PANEL MEMBER COE: No follow-up questions.

23 CHAIR DICKISON: No further follow-up questions.

24 MR. DAWSON: Madam Secretary, how much time is  
25 left in the 90 minutes, please?

1 MS. PELLMAN: Three minutes, ten seconds.

2 MR. DAWSON: Thank you. Ms. Akutagawa, with the  
3 remaining time we'd like to offer you the opportunity to  
4 make a closing statement to the Panel, if you wish.

5 MS. AKUTAGAWA: Awesome, great. Well, first of  
6 all thank you very much for having me participate in this.  
7 I will be honest, I didn't think I was going to get this  
8 far. And so, it's been a pleasure being able, and an honor  
9 being able to be considered as a viable candidate to come  
10 this far.

11 I really do believe that this is a chance for me  
12 to serve the state and the citizens of California in a way  
13 that is different than what I've done in my role as the CEO  
14 of a nonprofit organization. I've always felt like I would  
15 love to be able to do something more and I thought that  
16 this would be one of those opportunities that would have  
17 both impact, but also more importantly one in which I can  
18 really bring a lot of the skill sets and attributes that I  
19 believe that I have that would really enable the work to be  
20 done in a way that I think is reflective of what really  
21 makes California special.

22 And so, I am hopeful that I will have an  
23 opportunity to go forward and to be able to be a part of  
24 this process, and be able to serve the citizens and  
25 residents of California. So, thank you very much for this



1 consideration and opportunity.

2 CHAIR DICKISON: Thank you, Ms. Akutagawa for  
3 meeting with us today.

4 Our next interview is at 3:00 o'clock, so we will  
5 recess until 2:59.

6 (Off the record at 2:44 p.m.)

7 (On the record at 2:59 p.m.)

8 CHAIR DICKISON: Calling the Applicant Review  
9 Panel meeting back to order.

10 I want to welcome Ms. Karla Van Meter for her  
11 interview. And I'm going to turn the time right over to  
12 Mr. Chris Dawson for the five standard questions.

13 MR. DAWSON: Thank you, Madam Chair.

14 I am going to read you five standard questions  
15 that the Panel has requested each applicant respond to.  
16 Are you ready to begin?

17 MS. VAN METER: Yes, I am.

18 MR. DAWSON: First question. What skills and  
19 attributes should all Commissioners possess?

20 What skills or competencies should the Commission  
21 possess collectively?

22 Of the skills, attributes and competencies that  
23 each Commissioner should possess, which do you possess?

24 In summary, how will you contribute to the  
25 success of the Commission?