

How Redistricting Is Helping President Obama - MabuhayRadio

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JGL Eye

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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How Redistricting Is Helping President Obama, Just Like in the 2008 Election Example

CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – In the United States, this is the year after every ten years when minorities stir to life to discuss their political future. This is the year following the decennial census mandated by the United States Constitution to apportion the number of members of the United States House of Representatives among the several states.

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Census statistics are also used in order to apportion federal funding for many social and economic programs.

Since cities and minority representatives have complained that urban residents and minorities are undercounted, the process of redistricting allowed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has become a favorite tool to redraw the lines and boundaries of electoral districts within a state to ensure that districts are substantially equal in population. This process affects districts at all levels of government – from local school boards, wards, and city councils to state legislatures and the U.S. House of Representatives.

Redistricting is the anathema of gerrymandering when the drawing of electoral districts gives one group or party, usually the incumbent, an unfair advantage over another.

There is no doubt the successful implementation of redistricting by the African-American community has become the template for Hispanics, Asians and other minorities. It is not far fetched to conclude that redistricting helped Blacks elect Barack Obama to the White House.

And as the Asian Americans fight for their political life, they are inviting their fellow minorities to get involved in the current redistricting debate. They are reminding everyone that according to the latest U.S. Census while the Asian Americans are rapidly increasing, the other races are declining.

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A 2nd REDISTRICTING HEARING

For instance, at the second of the four hearings of the Illinois Senate Redistricting Committee last April 6 in Springfield, Illinois, members of Asian-American Institute, a member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, had submitted maps containing three different areas in northern Cook County that are cohesive communities: the Des Plaines area, Skokie area, and northern Chicago (West Ridge and Albany Park) area. These three proposed maps represent unified communities with significant Asian-American populations that are fragmented between several Illinois House and Senate Districts. Like Chicago's Chinatown area, the West Ridge/Albany Park area is divided amongst five House districts and three Senate districts.

"It is imperative that Asian Americans input are taken into consideration during the process of redrawing the new legislative boundaries," said Sung Yeon Choi-Morrow, Asian-American Institute's community organizer. "Over the last decade, we have significantly increased voter registration, voter turnout, and overall civic engagement, but fragmentation of our communities across different districts has prevented us from electing the candidate of our choice."

"The new Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011 provides us with a powerful tool to protect the voting rights in our community. Even though we may come from different countries, there are many cultural and social similarities between our groups," commented Kiran Siddiqui, executive director of the Hamdard Center for Health and Human Services. "Our community is united by our common immigrant histories, income levels, and access to services."

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"We want to continue in our participation at the Redistricting Committee hearings so that we can encourage transparency and consideration of our interests," said Ahlam Jabara, interim executive director at Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago.

TERMS OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The Asian-American Institute calls on state leaders to listen and respond to Asian-American voices during the redistricting process and beyond, keep the Asian-American community whole, and make the entire redistricting process transparent.

Illinois Senator Kwame Raoul, Chairperson of the Senate Redistricting Committee, is inviting everybody to attend additional hearings on April 16, 2011 in Kankakee and in Peoria and on April 19, 2011

in
Cicero

The new Illinois law allows redrawing of Congressional and state legislative districts involving

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racial and language minority communities under the following guidelines: 1) "Crossover districts," where the minority is potentially large enough to elect the candidate of its choice with the help from voters outside the minority; 2) "Coalition districts," where minorities could form a coalition to elect the candidate of their choice; and 3) "Influence districts," where a minority can influence an election outcome even if its preferred candidate cannot be elected.

If minority voters have mastered these terms, they can train their knowledge on other terms spawned by the Voting Rights Act of 1965: Packing, Cracking, Section 2, Section 5, Gingles Factors, Ideal Population, Community Interests, Majority-Minority District, Minority Vote Dilution, Racially polarized voting or racial bloc voting, etc.

For starters, Packing is a form of vote dilution prohibited under the Voting Rights Act where a minority group is over concentrated in a small number of districts. For example, packing can occur when the African-American population is concentrated into one district where it makes up 90% of the district, instead of two districts where it could be 50% of each district.

Cracking is a form of dilution occurring when districts are drawn so as to divide a geographically compact minority community into two or more districts. If the minority community is politically cohesive and could elect a preferred candidate if placed in one district but, due to cracking, the minority population is divided into two or more districts where it no longer has any electoral control or influence, the voting strength of the minority population is diluted.

Section 2 is a key provision of the Voting Rights Act that that protects minority voters from practices and procedures that deprive them of an effective vote because of their race, color or membership in a particular language minority group. While Section 5 is key provision of the Voting Rights Act that prohibits jurisdictions covered by Section 5 from adopting voting changes, including redistricting plans, that worsen the position of minority voters or changes adopted with a discriminatory purpose. # # #

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