

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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“Redistricting” of Asian-American Turfs to Be Blocked

CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – Four of the five leading mayoral candidates in Chicago agreed to prevent the redistricting of some Asian American bailiwicks so that Asian Americans can rally behind an aspiring Asian-American candidate for Chicago alderman.

The identical pledge of support was aired Tuesday, Feb. 8, by mayoral candidates Patricia Watkins, Miguel del Valle, Carol Mosley Braun and Geri Chico during the historic Mayoral Candidates' Forum through PAVE (Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment), a collaboration of ten Asian American organizations serving Chicago's diverse communities, before a crowd of about 1,000 in the St. Augustine College Hall at 1345 West Argyle Street in Chicago's Uptown community ahead of the Feb. 22 mayoral elections. Front-running Rahm Emanuel was invited to attend the forum but declined the invitation.

Written by Bobby M. Reyes

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The forum was moderated by Indian-American Ravi Baichwal, news anchor of ABC7 News. It was hosted by the Asian-American Institute under Executive Director Tuyet Le, who told the crowd that as part of the swing vote, the Asian Americans can vote as early as Feb. 18 at their nearest location until the "Feb. 22nd, whether it snows or not," during the historic "Get-Out-And-Vote" event.

Local School Council Chairperson June Moy Coutre of John C. Haines Elementary School in the heart of Chinatown popped the questions: "Will you commit to vetoing a map that continues to split Asian-American neighborhoods, like Chinatown, Albany Park and West Ridge, into multiple wards? And will you lead the way to pass ordinances that would improve the transparency and public-input aspects of redistricting in the City of Chicago?"

Mr. Del Valle said, "I advised Asian Americans of being involved in redistricting ten years ago but nothing happened. This time (if I get elected), you will get results -- of support from the city and federal levels. And I will veto a map that will split neighborhoods. And we are not going to tolerate (what happened in the past) and there should be public hearing on this matter."

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Former Senator Braun said, "I filed a redistricting bill that was inherited by Mr. Del Valle to bring democracy to Chicago, open the door to include everyone. I congratulate you for holding this forum."

Former mayoral Chief of Staff Chico said, "I will work with Asian Americans for fair representation. I will not close doors (on you on this) and I will hold public hearing with groups this size and asked you to be vigilant with the process. And I will see that this community gets that (aldermanic) position in the council."

COALITION BUILDING

Dr. Watkins said, "I [will] build a coalition. I will improve the school justice system. I am sick and tired of corruption in home school. I need someone who recognizes corruption when he sees one, voices it loud and clear. Holds on to his commitment."

Moy Coutre explained that when she was advocating for "educational funding for our school and much needed resources ... that include a modernized library and a recreational center for our students," she turned to elected officials for help. But her area falls "across four city wards, three state senate districts, four state representative districts and three congressional districts."

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She said, “[I]t is not easy advocating to so many different representatives and the Chinatown’s vote is diluted into four city wards rather than being in one ward and having a representative who will fight for our issues and our needs.”

There are 50 Aldermen in the City of Chicago and not one Asian American. Filipino-American Naisy Dolar came close to winning in an aldermanic election but lost in a run-off election in 2007. Asian Americans are struggling to access city resources, partly due to “fragmentation of minority neighborhoods and the dilution of minority voting rights through redistricting. Asian Americans have joined together this election season to break the redistricting cycle because we care about fair representation in our government, in our resources, and in our political maps,” according to Ms. Moy Coutre.

A Filipino-American coalition was among the seven Asian-American groups which co-partnered in organizing a discussion of community issues before hundreds of Asian Americans Tuesday night.

The Alliance for Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment (AFIRE) led by Executive Director Jerry B. Clarito and Juanita Burris fielded a senior citizen, Francisco Candelario of Albany

Park

, among the panelists who asked a question on public safety. Joining AFIRE at the jampacked event were members of Our Lady of Mercy parish, who have been volunteering to help AFIRE get out the vote among their Filipino-American neighbors and friends in Albany

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PUBLIC-SAFETY QUESTION

Mr. Candelario, 74, a Manila-born former bank employee asked the four candidates the question: "While it has been widely reported that crime rates have decreased here in Chicago from 2009 to 2010, seniors and new immigrants continue to be targeted for crimes at a higher rate than other populations. Under your administration, how will the Chicago Police Department be better equipped to serve and protect Asian Americans with language and cultural competency?"

Mr. Chico said, "We need the help of organization like yours; to fund advisory groups, funding remain strong."

Ms. Watkins: "Raise millions of dollars from building revenues; waive fees for all small entrepreneurs in two years so they can establish their businesses."

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Mr. Del Valle: "Because city funding is small, most funding comes from state and federal governments, community agencies must secure funding from state with strong leadership of the mayor, who can provide them help to secure funding. There should be state and federal funding [that will be] appropriately used to fund to staff with those that speak the language to improve the community."

Ms. Braun: "Put officers back on the street to provide adequate protection" (to the community).

Qudsia Sultana, a Pakistan American, drew an identical affirmative answer when she asked the four candidates: "While the Asian-American population in Illinois has increased by almost 50% in the last decade, funding for social services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate have not grown at the same rate. Will you commit to ensuring equitable growth in funding for such services?"

Other issues raised were resources for social services; small businesses; and minority-business enterprise/affirmative action. # # #

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