

November 14, 2013

Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

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Dear Honorable Commissioners,

Thank you for your volunteer service to our community.

In the last US Census, Austin reached a historic turning point where ethnic racial 'minorities' are now the majority. Yet, right now there are proposed only four minority districts out of ten. Geographically and mathematically it is possible to carve out five.

Alongside concerns over minorities' under-representation, there is a parallel need to diminish *over*-representation of "Anglos" down to a reasonable proportional level. Both aims can be done by carving out this fifth minority district.

A new district 7 in North Austin can be drawn that is 55 percent minority -- roughly 35 percent Hispanic and 10 percent each for African American and Asian American.

Please note that this extra "majority minority district" ***doesn't change or dilute the ability of districts 1 through 4 to elect minority candidates of their choice.*** As a "minority coalition" district, it would be analogous to existing District 1 in that no one racial group could elect a candidate without votes from the other groups.

One myth is that somehow Asians don't count as a protected minority under federal law. Since 1975, along with Hispanics, Alaska natives, and Native Americans, my understanding is that they do -- under both sections 2 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA).

Moreover, the necessity to consider an extra 'minority coalition district' is established more by the *other* minority groups that would populate a revised District 7: the Hispanics (35%) and blacks (10%), which everyone concedes *are* protected by VRA and suffered historic discrimination in Texas.

These groups -- together and apart -- could have an enhanced influence by virtue of having greater than average numbers located geographically close together such that they could be drawn into a district, considerations under VRA analysis. So, whether you call it a "majority minority," "minority coalition," "minority opportunity," or "minority influence," such a district clearly qualifies for consideration.

There may be some good reasons why this should not be done, even if it can be done. However, I would stress a necessity for you to furnish a positive rationale for why this should *not* be done, for the record.

The point of the attached map submission is not to 'prove up' the numbers for any specific alignment of districts. I'm sure I made some errors and the district locations and numbers are all based on 2010 precinct boundaries. It's simply an illustration to show that five majority minority districts are possible.

I also would like to reiterate a need for transparency. One reason I used the 2010 precinct boundaries and numbers is that the updated precinct information were not reasonably available in a user-friendly format.

I request that you publish the detail, by precinct, of the numbers that sum to your conclusions for your draft final map. Instead of the thirty-plus demographic categories in your spreadsheet, they can be summarized much more easily for the public in terms of 'Hispanic,' 'White,' 'African American,' 'Asian,' and 'All Other' categories for both 'Population' and 'Voting Age Population.'

I know the time is short but your consultants and staff can produce this information for the public. That is what they are paid for, I trust.

Also, on the transparency/accountability front, several people in your November 13 hearing questioned the reasons for the changes made between the preliminary and final draft. I would request you furnish both a narrative rationale and numbers to show why you made the choices you did.

Sincerely,

Stephen K. Beers