



Forward Strategies

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TO: Scott Adrian
FROM: Joel Gratz, Forward Strategies LLC
DATE: Tuesday, January 31, 2012
RE: Draft to allow Legislative Districts to be drawn on census blocks vs. wards.

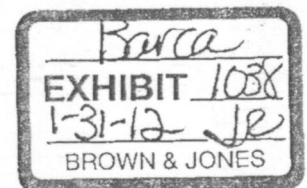
As I mentioned on our phone call last week, Mike White contacted me and the Senate is definitely interested in pursuing a change that would facilitate drawing Legislative and Congressional district plans based on census blocks instead of the current practice of wards. Of course they can only proceed if there is shared interest. He'd like to get a sense of the Assembly interest before next Friday's Redistricting Staff Working Group (RSWG).

Review of Possible Legislation

At the November 6, 2009 RSWG meeting, LRB 09-0193/P3 was distributed which would modify current law to help facilitate using census blocks rather than ward boundaries for legislative and congressional district maps. This proposed draft is simpler version of 1999 AB 40/SB 518 introduced by JCLO.

Current law requires counties and municipalities to update their wards, aldermanic and supervisory districts after each census. Those actions must be completed within 180 days of the publication of the census results, usually by October the year after the census is conducted. Once counties and municipalities have submitted their wards to the state, the legislature may begin creating legislative and congressional districts based upon those wards. As a practical matter there can be a delay after the 180 window as the ward map information is prepared and processed by LTSB staff. Currently law does allow that the legislature may adjust ward boundaries to create legislative and congressional district plans, but appears to be somewhat limited in its scope. The LRB draft presented facilitates the use of census blocks in plan creation by providing clear direction to counties on municipalities on their need to update ward boundaries based upon legislative and congressional plans passed by the legislature.

The draft further standardizes some language and clarifies how to address corrections to census results.



The 1999 Bill has some additional provisions of note that are not included in the current LRB draft:

- Removes minimum ward population requirements.
- Provides that municipal annexations shall not take effect until the Secretary of State receives information including census block numbers describing the annexation as well as estimates of the population of the annexed territory. (This would be particularly helpful in tracking ward changes through the decade and keeping all election statistics current and correct.)

Discussion of Impact

Giving the legislature greater ability to draw plans based upon census blocks rather than wards has two main advantages neither of which is insignificant.

The first is a greater timeframe to work on plans. Currently, final plans based upon wards cannot begin until well into the fall (October or November) as the legislature must wait for counties and municipalities to complete their wards and districts and have the information processed by LTSB. Court action in lieu of a legislative plan has sometimes gotten underway before the year ends with a trial not far into the near year, leaving a small window to draw plans, complete negotiations, collect input and complete the legislative process. If the legislature could begin their work based upon census blocks, map drawing could begin almost as soon as the census data is delivered in March or April of 2011 giving much greater time for entire process.

[Note: In the 2000-2001 round there was even some quiet discussion of including redistricting as part of the budget bill which is of course only possible if plans could be drawn based on the blocks. This of course could have its strategic advantages and disadvantages to consider.]

The second impact of drawing on the census blocks is the greater flexibility in fine tuning the boundaries of each district. Census blocks being smaller units than wards, the various redistricting criteria (ie. Compactness, population deviation, etc) can often be better achieved. Districting plans can also be more finely drawn to address various political considerations including competitiveness and location of incumbents.

The last potential (while a very long shot in my opinion) consideration that Mike White mentioned was if the Census was able to accelerate the data release of data to January of 2011, if plans could be drawn on blocks they could be completed before the current legislature and governor depart.