

Two legislative redistrictings - one in 2012 and perhaps another in 2014

Alaska could go through two legislative reapportionments after the 2010 census. The first would be the result of our own state districting process. Inclusive within this process will be contentious litigation that always results. And in Alaska, it has not been infrequent that the Court has taken control and redrawn the plan by appointed court masters.

Now comes the test! Any Alaska plan, or even election laws must be pre-cleared by the U.S. Justice Department civil rights division to ensure it complies with the requirements of the federal U.S. Voters Rights Act of 1965, and subsequent revisions. Alaska is in a special category with nine others states (*all in the Old South*). There were a number of reasons why we earned inclusion, but one was an "English language" test for voting in our state constitution. This was never implemented, and subsequently repealed. **Note:** In fact, Alaska did not even implement voter registration until the election of 1968.

Nevertheless, getting tangled up with U.S. Justice preclearance on the state 2012 plan could cause delay preventing resolution and implementation prior to the 2012 elections. The result of delay would be some kind of interim plan for 2012, i.e. use of the existing plan, the state proposed plan, or temporary court imposed plan.

The problem been with us since before statehood, and is built into the small size of our House and Senate

Alaska's increasingly skewed districting map is a natural result of a very small but fixed number of our 20 member Senate and 40 member House (*smallest in the nation*). The size of the House and Senate is fixed. However, the state's population has grown much faster in the urban areas, along the railbelt, and in coastal cities like Juneau, than in the smaller communities scattered along the extensive Alaska coastline and in the vast rural Interior of the state. This means districts in urban centers become more numerous and compact, but rural districts become fewer and must become huge and ungainly to gather sufficient population for a district, taking in regions completely unrelated and separated from each other.

For example, Sen. Johnny Ellis, D-Anchorage, can walk his downtown Anchorage district North and South, East and West, in just a few hours. Sen. Al Kookesh, D-Angoon, must catch a plane to Juneau (or ferry), catch Alaska Airlines to Anchorage, and then fly to Aniak of the Lower Kuskokwim or Holy Cross on the Lower Yukon. This district is half the size of Alaska.

We started with an enlarged house of 40 districts that fit the Alaska socio-economic map perfectly

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At statehood our first district plan for the House fit the "constitutional socio-economics criteria" almost perfectly. We wonder whether constitutional crafters of this first plan (*done at the 1955 Constitutional Convention*) knew that an increase in the House from 24 members to 40 members would fit the existing socio-political map so well, making most happy. Nevertheless, it did just that "political job. It kept everyone happy, and that may have been especially important during the time of Congressional review and creation of the Statehood Act (*as well as our own Alaska local vote on statehood*).

Note: *The constitutional committee charged with drafting the scheme was not without its bit of controversy and regional politics, i.e. Anchorage against everyone else, the latter reportedly wanting a plan, at least partially, radiating out from turban centers.*

So, to avoid the "others," meaning Anchorage delegates, reportedly Fairbanks Delegate George Cooper and Nenana/Yukon Delegate Jack Coghill, put together a little mid-night caucus in Delegate George Cooper's basement. Meanwhile, one of their faith kept the Anchorage delegation busy at the Fairbanks Second Avenue Mecca Bar.

Note: *As most states did at this time Alaska had a Senate based on regional geography.*

This 1955 plan by "population count" was out-of-date by statehood, but another census was just around the corner. Further, everyone probably understood this, because the 1960 reapportionment plan had to do some serious revising, and yet produced little acrimony. *It was the only plan that has escaped court review and litigation.*

The point is that the first statehood districts fit the socio-economic map perfectly. However, from that day on every decennial redistricting forced the outlying and coastal districts into contortions, struggling to fit constitutional criteria and then the mandates of the ethnic criteria imposed by the 1965 U.S. Voters Right Act and subsequent revisions. Further, almost simultaneously the U.S. Supreme Court Tennessee case brought down the traditional regional Senates across the country. This was a political shock in itself

With a 20 member Senate and 40-member House, and a landmass that imposes huge barriers, we are now about out-of-gas in being able to meet the mandates of the U.S. Voters Rights Act. The issue is! Might the U.S. Justice Department question the size of our legislative bodies, and due to their small fixed size, our ability to provide ethnic representation required under the U.S. Voters Rights Act.

- Ongoing series of back grounders