

A cleaner simpler district map

By Heber Taylor | Posted: Sunday, March 18, 2012 12:00 am

If you want to see what's wrong with the county's plan for drawing new district lines for county commissioners all you have to do is look at an alternate plan drawn by Gulf Coast Interfaith.

Interfaith is not a political organization.

People who volunteer with the organization usually do so for reasons of faith rather than politics. There are Democrats and Republicans among the volunteers but politics are generally checked at the door as are denominational lines.

The map similar to one proposed by County Commissioner Stephen Holmes is different from the county's map which was rejected by the U.S. Department of Justice in one obvious way and one less obvious way.

Obviously the lines are cleaner. The map prepared by the county's consultants looks like a classical gerrymander. Its district boundaries are convoluted. The map's critics including the justice department's lawyers might suspect that the lines were drawn for political gain rather than to comply with the Voting Rights Act.

The folks at Gulf Coast Interfaith drew a much simpler map. Unlike the county's map it tends to keep the smaller cities in one commissioner's precinct. Where it divides cities among county commissioner districts it uses landmarks such as railroads or highways. You don't need a global positioning system to tell which county commissioner's district you're in.

The less obvious thing about Interfaith's map? Unlike the county's map it wouldn't be a challenge for the justice department.

The boundary lines of the districts of elected officials are redrawn after every census to reflect changes in population.

In Galveston County the trends are obvious:

First the growth was in the north county.

Second Galveston lost population.

Third the county's overall population still grew and the fastest growing segment was the Latino population.

If you draw a map that reflects those basic facts you can do so simply. Interfaith proved that.

It drew District 3 now represented by Stephen Holmes to remain a district that is made up mostly of

minorities.

It drew District 1 now represented by Pat Doyle to be a 50-50 precinct a “minority impact” district in the lingo of the justice department.

Democrats of course would love to see that kind of map.

Another option of course is to ignore the growth in the minority population and draw a map that forces that growth into one district with just one vote on the commissioners court.

Republicans control the commissioners court this time. Democrats controlled the commissioners court for decades past. Neither party has proved to be above politics each time districts are redrawn after each census.

And so the county has a map that the justice department doesn't like.

There is a new map offered as an alternative but even if accepted by the justice department the argument remains the same. If simple fairness is what you're after you can draw a simple map.