

B4

TUESDAY
May 31, 2011

Opinion

The Daily News | galvnews.com

OUR VIEW

A good question about redistricting

Two groups — Gulf Coast Interfaith and the League of United Latin American Citizens — are looking at the maps proposing new districts for members of the Galveston school board.

Governments throughout Galveston County should take notice. This exercise in democracy has implications far beyond any one school board.

The two groups asked for a couple of weeks to review the data behind the school district's redistricting plans. They were given until today.

Joe Compian, a member of Gulf Coast Interfaith, has asked an excellent question: Why can't the public get access to the software that would allow everyone to see the demographic implications of moving a boundary line — whether that move be a block or a mile?

The process of drawing district boundaries involves preserving communities of interest. Given the nation's history with minority voters, the U.S. Justice Department has taken special interest in review redistricting plans to ensure they do not dilute the voting power of minorities.

After each census, lines are redrawn so that each district on a city council or school board has roughly the same population. The lines can be drawn in many ways. New software allows ordinary citizens to draw their own lines and see for themselves the implications of various scenarios.

Does one map force all minorities into one district, thus allowing them to elect only one representative on a seven-member governing board? Does an alternate map split minority populations among several districts, making it

difficult to elect a minority representative?

The software is expensive, but its cost has been dropping. In Los Angeles County, which has a population of almost 10 million, everyone has access to the applications that allow those interested to look at the impact of proposed districts.

It's always been important to involve as many citizens as possible in redistricting process.

As a practical matter, the number of citizens who *can* be involved has increased dramatically with the new technology.

Compian's question comes down to this: If it's technologically possible to involve almost every voter in this process, why don't you?

This is a challenge for every government in Galveston County.

• Heber Taylor

