

How Congressional Redistricting affects the GLBT community

by Winnie Stachelberg with Mike Mings
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Every ten years since 1790, the federal government has undertaken the enormous task of counting every person in the country as part of a requirement in the Constitution. These figures — used by businesses and demographic experts — help to determine federal contracts and aid. The original intent of a national census, however, was to assess changes in the population in order to assure representation in the US House of Representatives.

The census conducted in 2000 will be used to determine the number of House seats that each state is assigned; this is known as reapportionment. Each state must then redraw all of its congressional districts based on population shifts in a process known as redistricting. With nearly all House districts being redrawn, the political landscape for the 108th Congress is unclear. Below is an assessment of the reapportionment and redistricting that will occur before the 2002 federal elections get started.

The Census and Sampling

The US Census Bureau surveyed the American people on April 1, 2000. Millions of questionnaires were mailed and thousands of counters canvassed the country. The final num-

bers of the census count, and the official number of representatives each state will receive, will be released from March to July 2001.

While the vast majority of Americans were counted accurately, many people and groups were missed or undercounted. People of color, people living in poverty and transient persons were the most challenging to capture. Some Democratic members of Congress proposed a sampling process to estimate the extent to which these constituencies were not represented and most Republicans favored numbers garnered from a hard count only.

Reapportionment

While the final state numbers are forthcoming, it appears that the following states will lose House seats: Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New York (2), Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania (2) and Wisconsin. States that stand to gain include: Arizona (2), California, Colorado, Florida (2), Georgia (2), Nevada, North Carolina and Texas (2). The movement of these seats in Congress is consistent with that of the last 200 years, as Americans move West and to the Sun Belt.

To determine these numbers, each state gets one representative, then the remaining 385 are split among the states based on new population figures. Most districts will be roughly equal

in population; the figure for the 1990s was around 640,000 to 660,000. Small states, regardless of size, are ensured one representative.

Redistricting

Redrawing federal and state legislative lines is generally a responsibility left to the state legislatures, and many do it differently. For federal lines, seven states will have only one delegate making these decisions. Seven states employ an independent commission. The remaining 36 states, including both North and South Carolina, are mapped by the legislatures. Each district is required to be nearly equal in population and must be contiguous and remain as compact as possible.

In 1991 and 1992, new Justice Department regulations required states to attempt to bolster the representation of minorities by concentrating constituencies in one district. A series of court cases since then has determined that race may not be a deciding factor in drawing lines, but can be considered. Political parties, communities and incumbency protection can also be factored.

The Justice Department requires 16 states, including North Carolina, to submit their plans to the department for approval because their maps in the past did not meet its requirements, like North Carolina's proposal for a snakelike

district along Interstate 85 from Durham to Gastonia. These shortcomings were found to have been based on race and occurred mostly in the southern states.

Most states will roll out their plans for districts before the end of the year; some will work into next year. The goals will be to allow time for candidates and voters to know their districts well before the state primaries. States with early congressional primaries, therefore, will be required to produce maps earlier than those that normally have primaries in August or September.

The Gay District

Some in the gay, lesbians, bisexual and transgender community have expressed interest in creating a majority-minority district that would create a gay majority in a given place. This plan is difficult because it would require finding nearly 400,000 GLBT persons in an area that is compact and contiguous. Further, it is also not likely to be looked upon favorably by map drawers or the Justice Department because data used in drawing maps is derived from the census, which has never included a question regarding sexual orientation on its surveys.

Scenarios for Select States

While the new numbers and new lines have yet to be announced or implemented, one thing is certain: Redistricting will produce a dramatic increase in marginal and vulnerable incumbents, both early and late in the cycle. At their time of need — even if it is a perceived need, or does not come to fruition — incumbent members of Congress will come to their supporters, including GLBT political groups, to ask for help. Like other political action committees, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and the other organizations working for equality for our community will be expected to increase their contributions to most of our friends.

Here are several examples of what might happen following redistricting. It is important to remember, however, that these decisions have not yet been made and are therefore subject to change.

California

After gaining seven seats in the 1990s reapportionment, California will get only one new seat this time, due to slower growth as a result of a recession in the early 1990s. Also new for this cycle is an all-Democratic lineup of the governor, the Senate and the Assembly. Because Democrats picked up four seats in the 2000 election, the first priority of map drawers is likely to protect these new Democratic incumbents — Mike Honda, Jane Harman, Susan Davis and Adam Schiff — all of whom most GLBT activists supported in 2000. A new Hispanic-majority district may also be created in the Los Angeles area, which had the most relative growth in the state. Democratic mapmakers could attempt to shift precincts around in the 53 districts to force some marginal Republican seats into pick-up opportunities for Democrats.

Florida

Republican Gov. Jeb Bush has a solid GOP majority in both the Senate and House in Florida, and is likely to ensure that the party retains a majority of the congressional delegation. Currently, Democrats hold eight seats in Florida while the Republicans have 15 seats. The two new seats that Florida is likely to be allotted could easily be drawn for Republicans in the fast-growing Orlando area or in South Florida. Republicans could also focus on adding GOP precincts to districts held by Democratic Rep. Jim Davis, 11th Congressional District, and/or Democrat Karen Thurman, 5th Congressional District, making both re-elections more difficult than in years past.

Georgia

In 1990, the Georgia congressional delegation consisted of nine Democrats and one Republican, Newt Gingrich. The post-1990 redistricting and the elections of 1992 brought one new seat, and therefore, eleven new districts, represented today by eight Republicans and three Democrats. The governor and both chambers of the legislature now are controlled by Democrats, who may choose to draw lines in a way that may add more Democrats to the delegation.

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