Our View

Redistricting proposal should be revamped!!!

Retired Wisconsin Judge Frederick Kessler listened to public sentiment Tuesday on his redistricting proposal. Kessler said he needed to hear from the people affected by redistricting in order to determine if he should tweak his plans. Well, he should tweak them.

Black lawmakers championed legislation expanding the council from four representatives to six representatives, thereby creating two additional wards and, theoretically, improving minorities chances of electing a representative that looks like them. Unable to create the minority-majority districts some had hoped for citing the city's integration, Kessler shuffles heavy Black and Hispanic concentrations into separate wards. (This plan is in contrast to his redistricting work in 1996 in which he lumped Black and Hispanics into Ward 3).

Kessler on Tuesday told the public that he sought "clean cuts" in drawing new boundaries for city of Las Vegas wards. Examining his plan, it appears that he did a credible job in keeping to his goal. But looks can be deceiving.

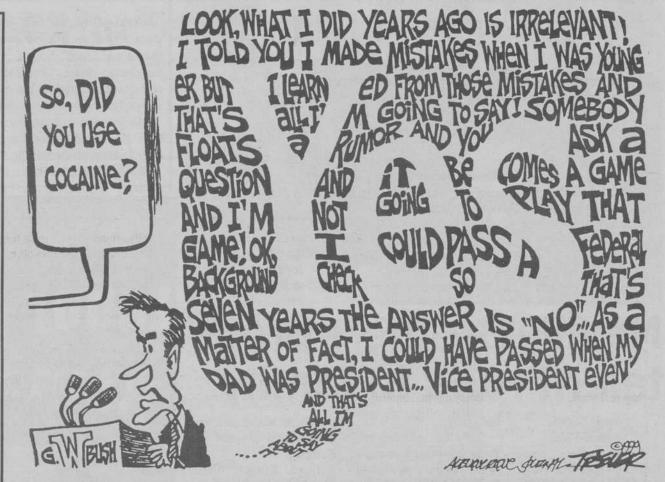
While Blacks and Hispanics are the dominant minorities in their respective wards, neither is the major force. Minorities claim Kessler left them out of the process and that's led to problems.

One problem causing a furor among Blacks is Ward 3's northern boundary. Kessler seems to abandon his own parameters for erecting boundaries. Instead of clean cut, what's been described as a turkey's head, juts out from Ward 3. The land lies to the south of Fremont Street and encompasses parts of downtown Las Vegas.

Kessler defended the turkey's head, saying that felt downtown would be better served by having two voices on the council—in essence, two councilman are better than one. That's not necessarily so. Who's to say the two representatives will agree on every project or will work cohesively?

Under Kessler's plan, Gary Reese would represent the Fitzgerald's, the Four Queens, Golden Nugget and other hotels on that side of Fremont while the Ward 5 representative would represent the California Club, Horseshoe, Main Street Station and others hotels.

Preserving downtown's sanctity should be important here. Aside from the historic ties between downtown and the Old West Las Vegas, it's practical to avoid fracture and the rifts it can cause. Even if the council approves the plan, questions could arise as to whether the boundaries would pass constitutional muster. Kessler's work isn't done. It's just beginning.



Voting reforms for the 21st century

Special to Sentinel-Voice

With two party control of the electoral process becoming a bigger and bigger concern, nonpartisan elections (elections run without party designation and without special privileges given to the candidates of the two major parties) are being considered as an alternative.

This summer New York City major Rudy Giuliani initiated a process to revise the city's charter and one of the charter commission's proposed revisions recommends that elections for Mayor and other citywide offices should be conducted on a nonpartisan basis.

This is done in major cities throughout the United States including Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Detroit and Dallas. The proposal was immediately mired in partisan controversy.

The Democrats were reluctant to support this reform because it would weaken their power and the Republicans supported it for the same reasons — it would weaken the Democrats hold on the electoral process.

This kind of partisan maneuvering around democracy reform makes the most eloquent case for why we need democracy reform.

Still, in spite of the fact that the New York proposal is now nearly dead — as a result of partisan crossfire — the concept is a good one.

Athearing on the proposed reforms, Dr. Allan Lichtman

For Black
Empowerment
By Dr. Lenora Fulani

of American University presented statistics to the commission on a recent study of 76 cities comparing nonpartisan and partisan elections for mayor.

These preliminary statistics indicate that nonpartisan elections may be advantageous in terms of minority representation. The sample of cities included only those with a population of 200,000 or greater (based on the 1990 census).

In total, 24 of the 76 cities have Black or Hispanics mayors. Of those 24 cities with Black or Hispanic mayors, 20 had conducted their elections on a nonpartisan basis. Comparatively speaking, 33% of cities that hold nonpartisan mayoral elections have Black or Latino mayors — 27% for cities where the election is conducted as a partisan race.

Many Americans share the desire to make the political process less partisan and to involve more voters. Nonpartisan elections conducted by Instant Runoff Voting ("IRV") — another kind of election reform —

would be a positive step in that direction.

Here's how Instant Runoff Voting works: A voter ranks the candidates in order of the voter's preference.

A computer program tabulates all of the first choice votes and determines whether any candidate received a majority. If not, the program eliminates the last-place candidate and transfer his or her votes to the next candidate ranked on each voter's ballot. This process continues until a candidate receives a majority.

Instant Runoff Voting would eliminate primary elections because the ranking of candidates in order of preference accomplishes one of the things that primaries accomplish. It saves millions of dollars in runoff elections, and it guarantees that the winner is supported by a majority of the voters.

Growing interest in IRV has raised the issue of the compatibility of voting equipment.

Many jurisdictions are replacing older voting equipment with more modern technology. Campaigns for IRV and/or serious studies about it have taken place or taking place at the state level in Alaska, New Mexico, Vermont, Texas and North Carolina. The state of Oregon switched to an all-mail voting system and as a result is enjoying a higher voter turnout and cost-savings of around \$3 million per election cycle.

In Florida, election officials have conducted a field test of Internet voting (See Voting, Page 17)

Las Vicus Sentinel Voice

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.

Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.

900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104

Telephone (702) 380-8100 • Fax (702) 380-8102

Contributing Writers:
Loretta Arrington
Lee Brown
Tammy McMahan
Sharon Savage
John T. Stephens III
Fred T. Snyder
Photographers:
John Broussard
Kimberly Edwards
Jonathan Olsen

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief Lynnette Sawyer, General Manager Dianna Saffold, Business Manager Catisha Marsh, Associate Editor Marcello Sawyer, Copy Editor Don Snook, Graphics Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association and West Coast Black Publishers Association