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Redistricting in Nebraska

By
Preston Love Jr.

We mourn the tragedies of Covid-19 and its mutant Delta, wildfires, floods, hurricanes, tornados, death and destruction, and life-changing occurrences because of them. In addition to those nature-based tragedies, we mourn man's invasion into peace, harmony and love, with complex racial and gender attacks, hate, political posturing, total dysfunction, and ultimately the attack on Democracy. We mourn, but we pray for our people and our country.

With all of these levels of hardships that we face, our personal challenge is to press on, continue with hope, advocacy and activism. We press on with an eye towards the future of our children and normalcy. We find ourselves challenged to stay focused amidst the surrounding trauma, the frontal attacks on our Democracy and our common sense. How did misinformation, big lies, hate and white supremacy, get its footing? We must press on.

We must press on to save our planet from violent climate change, save the world from war and rumors of war, terrorism, save our country from infrastructure and moral decay, the dilution of the checks and balances in our three branches of governmental, and the undermining and suppression, of Democracies basics; voting rights for everyone. We must press on.

In Nebraska, we come upon another responsibility, to translate our most recent 2020 Census Count, and its resulting population shifting, (mostly from rural to urban), and redraw the district boundaries for our State Senate legislative districts and our three Congressional Districts. What's at stake is, who represents the people. This process is called redistricting. Redistricting has the potential for Nebraska to be the good, the bad, or the ugly.

For the record, redistricting attempts to make the various State Legislative Districts and the Congressional Districts, to be relatively equal in population and to provide a fair method and a fair resulting state and federal districts. That's the good.

The lines can be drawn to alter the balance of power, in a way that is not representative of voters and undermines the equality and fairness of the one person, one vote rule, and to not preserve recognizable and cohesive communities. That's bad.

The bad becomes ugly, when there is a manipulation of the district lines, to give one political party an advantage over another. Often it allows parties and politicians in power to stay in power by creating an unfair advantage. That ugly process is called, "gerrymandering."

Nebraska has started the process of redistricting. The Nebraska Legislature has been charged with managing and conducting the redistricting process. Drafts of initial maps are in progress, and a redistricting committee, made up of nine state senators is in the process of reviewing and getting public input on those maps. By November, the legislature will approve, and vote, on final matters, and by December, the Governor will sign, or veto, the supporting legislation.

We, as a people, need to press on, participate, become watchdogs to ensure that the redistricting process does not become “bad” or “gerrymandering.” We need to be in contact with our Senators, we need to be in contact with our Senators who are on the Redistricting Committee, we need to attend public hearings to make our voices heard, and we need to educate and spread the word to our fellow citizens.

Many organizations are providing information to the public, and providing fair maps for consideration. I mention the League of Women Voters, and Common Cause, as an example. In our area, Senators Carol Blood, from Bellevue, Steve Lathrop and Justin Wayne from Omaha are on the 2021 Nebraska Redistricting Committee.

There are redistricting hearings planned. The following dates and locations have been announced for the Redistricting Committee’s public hearings on draft maps:

- **September 15 at 9:00am**
 - Nebraska State Capitol Bldg.
 - 1445 K St.
 - Room 1524
 - Lincoln, NE

- **September 16 at 10:00am**
 - **Scott Conference Center**
 - **6450 Pine St.**
 - **Omaha, NE**

Black Votes Matter Institute of Community Engagement will be conducting a Town Hall Meeting, intended to educate the public on how to interact, participate and give input to the redistricting process. That Town Hall Meeting will take place on Tuesday, September 14, 2021, at 6:00 P.M., at 2514 North 24th Street.

May I add, my recommendation to decline to sign the petition that is being circulated, in order to put on the next election ballot an initiative to change the constitution to require Voter ID prior to voting in Nebraska. We don’t need Voter ID, we don’t need to alter our constitution, we need only to press on.