

To: [REDACTED]

--Central California--

Question:

With a majority Hispanic population in Tulare County and a growing majority elsewhere in the Valley, why does Rep Nunes and other elected officials still fail to address issues and critical concerns of with this growing constituency?

-(indeed, the need of fairly drawn districts to represent a large growing Valley ethnic population, instead of ignoring it!)-

--All of California--

Hispanic groups dispute new California political maps

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and DON THOMPSON,

Associated Press

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SANTA ANA -- Hispanic advocacy groups in California are alarmed about new political maps that sketch proposed boundaries for congressional and state legislative districts, saying the changes will disenfranchise the fastest-growing segment of the population in a state where the number of Hispanic politicians has soared during the past two decades.

The debate over that concern is likely to escalate in the coming weeks, as an independent redistricting commission takes public comment and wrestles with revisions before voting on a

final version Aug. 15.

Since the commission released its draft earlier this month, advocacy groups have begun organizing their members and are urging Hispanic voters to attend public hearings in force to voice their concerns. Several groups have submitted their own proposals, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund raised the possibility of legal action under the 1965 Voting Rights Act if it is not satisfied with the final results.

"We really believe that the maps proposed by the commission could seriously impair the future of Latino political progress," said Rosalind Gold, senior policy director at the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund. "Latinos accounted for 90 percent of the state's population growth in the last decade, but we don't think the maps reflect that."

The debate is important in California, where no racial or ethnic group has a majority of the population. Thirty-seven percent of the state's 37 million residents are Hispanic, according to the 2010 Census, while Asians account 13 percent and blacks just over 6 percent. About 40 percent of Californians identify themselves as non-Hispanic whites. Thirty-two percent of the state's population was Hispanic in 2000.

One advocacy group, the League of United Latin American Citizens, is working on its own suggested map while organizing opposition to the political boundaries drawn by the citizens commission.

"You've got a huge realignment," said Art Montez, public policy chief for Santa Ana branch of the league. "Catsup used to be the No. 1 sauce, and now it's salsa. You've got to face the reality."

Most notably, the proposed shift in districts could endanger the congressional seat of Rep. Loretta Sanchez, one of California's most prominent Hispanic lawmakers. Her victory in conservative Orange County almost 15 years ago signaled the rising power of the Hispanic electorate.

Sanchez, who survived a tight race to win her eighth term last year, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

The draft maps also would dilute majority Latino voting populations in two state Senate districts currently held by Juan Vargas, D-San Diego, and Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles. De Leon said he thought the commission had done a good job overall and will make needed changes before issuing its final maps in August.

In central Los Angeles County, "the minority districts were all pushed together," potentially forcing some Hispanic lawmakers to run against each other in the next election, said Steven Ochoa, MALDEF's national redistricting coordinator.

Two new majority Latino seats would be created in the Assembly, in San Diego and the San Fernando Valley, said Gold. But two would be lost: one west of downtown Los Angeles and the other the Orange County seat currently held by Assemblyman Jose Solorio, D-Santa Ana. His district currently has a 52 percent Latino voting-age population, but would be split, leaving a district with 46.5 percent Latino voters.

The Latino voting-age population in the southeast Los Angeles County seat currently held by Assemblyman Tony Mendoza, D-Artesia, also would drop, from nearly 48 percent to 16.5 percent. Mendoza -- who, like Solorio, is termed out in 2012 and would not personally be affected -- issued a statement saying the draft maps "disenfranchise people of color."

His overlapping Senate district, now represented by termed-out state Sen. Lou Correa, D-Anaheim, also would lose Latino voters. Correa said the state's growing Latino population must be fairly represented but said the larger focus should be on drawing legislative boundaries around voters who share common backgrounds or experiences.

"Everybody talks ethnicity, but I believe it's the community of interest -- that's what binds you," Correa said. "The social economics, blue collar jobs, education challenges -- those are the factors that could dictate."

California's 14-member Citizens Redistricting Commission was established after voters approved a 2008 proposition that put the drawing of district lines in the hands of citizens

instead of the state Legislature.

Commission members include a retired high school principal, a stay-at-home mother, chiropractor and insurance broker. The commission released draft maps on June 10 and on Thursday began a string of public hearings around the state.

"Now that we have these maps, now that we know we are dealing with some real challenges for our community, it's critical that Latinos get out to the meetings and testify," Gold said.

Under the current district maps, Gold said Hispanic voters have a fair chance of electing a candidate of their choice in seven of California's 53 congressional districts, based on population and other factors. There are 10 state Assembly districts, out of 80, where Hispanics hold more than 50 percent of the voting-age population and six of 40 state Senate districts where that is true.

The proposed maps do not increase the number of Hispanic-leaning congressional and Assembly districts despite the explosion in the Hispanic population and reduce the number of state Senate districts where Hispanics hold sway to four.

Some groups, such as MALDEF, have submitted their own maps to the commission that create 11 congressional districts where Hispanic candidates could prevail.

MALDEF also proposes three new state Senate districts: near Fresno in the Central Valley; in south Los Angeles County; and in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Its map includes four new Latino-oriented Assembly districts: near Bakersfield in the Central Valley; in Riverside County; south Los Angeles County; and in the southern portion of the city of Los Angeles.

Hispanic political organizers find the proposed realignment of Sanchez's district particularly troubling. The draft maps call for the veteran congresswoman to lose some heavily Hispanic parts of Anaheim and see her district expanded into a heavily Vietnamese-American area known as Little Saigon. The large, well-established refugee community is politically active and staunchly Republican.

Last year, Sanchez avoided defeat by challenger Van Tran, a Vietnamese-born state assemblyman and attorney who is closely watching the redistricting process.

"It's going to be favorable for any candidate who's going to challenge the incumbent," Tran said. "The draft that the commission released makes the district highly competitive."

Experts watching the redistricting process unfold said concerns among Hispanic voters might be unwarranted. The Hispanic electorate is no longer the endangered group it once was, and the commission is likely taking into account less well-represented ethnic groups as it tried to even the political playing field, said James V. Lacy, who co-owns a law firm specializing in election law

The draft maps don't appear to violate the Voting Rights Act, and any challenges would be unlikely to withstand court scrutiny, said Lacy.

Associated Press writer Don Thompson reported from Sacramento.