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From: "Tony Quinn" <[REDACTED]>
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The Redistricting =ommission: Descending into a Racial Quagmire



By Tony Quinn

Political Commentator and Former Legislative Staffer =o:p>

Thu, July 7th, =011

The Friends of the African American Caucus =on't think highly of California Redistricting Commission =ommissioner Connie Galambos Malloy. The Caucus wrote in their most =ecent posting:

“As millions of Americans put =ut their flags and fired up the grill to celebrate freedom and =emocracy over the 4th of July weekend, Commissioner Connie Galambos =alloy of the California Redistricting Commission fired a salvo at =frican American voters in Los Angeles as she penciled them out of their =raditional community districts and hard fought political power. =o:p>

“Malloy, who is from the San Francisco Bay Area, =ommitted her dastardly deeds with stealth and incredible disrespect for =frican American electoral participation, creating serpentine, =eandering and totally nonsensical districts. This was done while most =alifornians were enjoying their holiday festivities and not paying =ttention to political intrigue. Was this intentional?” =o:p>

Actually, I can tell them that Commissioner Galambos =alloy's sins were not intentional. They result from something =uch more basic: the decision of the Redistricting Commission to hire a =taff of line drawers and attorneys who know nothing about the complex =emographics of California, especially Southern California, and who are =n the process of producing redistricting plans that will either =ollapse into racial infighting or will be so bizarre that they will be =verted by referendum.

The 14-member Commission was =urposely populated with people who had no redistricting experience; =hat's OK. But they then hired a staff of liberal Berkeley =emographers with equal inexperience and a San Francisco attorney with =o background in urban demographics. So we

should not be surprised they have come up with plans sure to outrage, and their districts have done just that.

Here is Galambos Malloy's dastardly act, according to the African American Caucus: >

"In her hacking up of South Los Angeles, Malloy showed no concern for the interests or inputs of African Americans, whose courageous historic struggle for voter rights have empowered all ethnic minorities.

"Instead, Malloy proposes to gut Black political power from the State Assembly, Senate and Congressional Districts without regard to a unified proposal with ethnic groups. She has removed Exposition Park, Harvard Park, Vermont Knowles and Vermont Square from legislative districts with historically high African American voting populations in order to group them with the cities of Vernon, Huntington Park and unincorporated Florence-Graham. >

"This configuration creates Latino majority assembly and Congressional seats, but leaves African American districts enemic."

There are two lessons here; first, the great danger the Commission faces in setting African Americans against Latinos, which its maps do because of the inexperienced line drawers. Second is the Commission's ignorance of the rich history of African American political representation in California, a subject I have always found quite fascinating.

The first African American member of the Assembly was elected in 1918, that's right 3 years ago, to represent south central Los Angeles. Why there, because Los Angeles was the terminal of the transcontinental railroad and the first good jobs available to black Americans escaping the segregated South were Pullman porters. The first black union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was founded by A. Philip Randolph in 1925. There was a black middle class in south central Los Angeles a century ago. >

Even more fascinating is the background of California's first black legislator, Assemblyman Frederick Madison Roberts, who served from 1918 until 1934. He was a Republican, as were all African Americans until the New Deal, but more interestingly, he was a great grandson of President Thomas Jefferson as a result of Jefferson's relations with his slave Sally Hemings. Thanks to DNA testing, it is now beyond question that Hemings had a least one child by Jefferson, and the proof is overwhelming that Hemings, Assemblyman Roberts's great grandmother, had several children by her master, the third president of the United States. (Disclosure, I am involved in an international family history DNA project, and have had the opportunity to study the Jefferson DNA.)

Republican assemblyman Roberts was defeated in 1934 by a Democrat, Augustus Hawkins, who went on to Congress in 1962, and ended up serving for half a century in public office. His successor in Congress is Rep. Maxine Waters, well known for her long advocacy of African American causes. >

I would not expect the Redistricting Commission to know much about the DNA of black officeholders, but I would expect them to have some appreciation of the long history of black political participation in Los Angeles politics. A more sensitive Commission, with more sophisticated staff, could have avoided this final salvo from the California Friends of the African American Caucus: >

"Despite the Commission's best intentions, as represented in its first draft and the mapping proposals submitted recently by a African American, Asian American and Latino citizen groups, African

Americans appear to come up short, are neutered politically in their strongest areas and are left with the perception that such plans are not invested in Black Los Angeles thriving.”

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we have strong disagreements with it, especially the mean-spirited and erroneous attack on Commissioner Galambos Malloy.

We would truly appreciate a correction as soon as possible. Thanks so much for your speedy consideration of this matter.

Marqueece Harris-Dawson
AARC Steering Committee

from my iPhone