

POLICY BRIEF

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Allegheny County's Reapportionment: Raw Partisanship

In a representative, elective government there can be no more important decision than the one that determines the geographic boundaries of the electoral districts. It would be naive to believe that politics will not be an inherent part of the process. But what we have witnessed in Allegheny County is beyond the pale.

The ramming through of the Democrat Council plan with no public input and without even a presentation to the reapportionment committee must win the prize for high-handedness. This performance, which is so reminiscent of the first draft of the Administrative Code, does not bode well for the future of Home Rule or any sense of balance in County governance.

In the first place, there should have been more thought given to the reapportionment process. Instead, we got a committee appointed by the president of Council with no motion or deliberation of Council, at least none the public could see. There was a reasonable and fair bill introduced by Republican members which would have established a bipartisan commission of five members with Democrats certain to have the majority. The Council dismissed that proposal on a party line vote. One would think that the Democrats would have at least put forth a well thought out, defensible reapportionment that could have been debated and subjected to some public scrutiny. But that didn't happen.

Beyond the callous disregard for any sense of propriety in setting up what turned out to be a sham committee, the Democrat's new map does not comply with the County's Administrative Code which spells out several explicit conditions for the reapportionment map. Bear in mind that the Administrative Code was drafted by a committee made up entirely of Democrats and was pushed through largely on party line votes.

Consider two key Code requirements with respect to reapportionment. Most pertinent in this instance is the requirement that no municipality be divided into more districts than necessary. Under the old map, the City was in four districts. In the new map, it is apportioned into six districts. Each County Council district contains just under 100,000 people. The City of Pittsburgh has 320,000 people. By placing the City into 6 districts,

the Council has given the City a potential influence far out of proportion to its share of the County's total population.

There can be little doubt that the restriction against dividing a municipality into more districts than is absolutely necessary has been violated.

Moreover, according to the Administrative Code, districts must be compact and the aggregate length of districts must be as short as possible. A casual glance at the new map shows that condition has not been met.

There is also a legitimate concern that since the reapportionment committee was essentially made up of Council members, its deliberations should have been public under the provisions of the Sunshine Act. And at the very least, the map developed should have been the subject of two or more public hearings. Finally, it is noteworthy that the new apportionment moves more than 400,000 people from one district to another. That's a third of Allegheny County. While not strictly illegal, it is indicative of the lengths the map makers were willing to go in order to adjust for a relatively small shift of population concentrations within the County. There can be little doubt that the new map is a completely partisan work product.

All that has been accomplished is to engender more cynicism about government. This reapportionment process was a test of representational government in the County. The results are not encouraging.

The Republican members of Council will be entirely justified in seeking legal redress of this high-handed and arrogant treatment of the people of Allegheny County. At some point Council must realize that progress Allegheny County cannot occur in an environment where old line party control is more important than good policy.

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