

# How immigration debate affects Census

If congressional seats were allocated according to the number of American citizens living in each state, which would seem a fair way of doing it, Louisiana would not be a loser after next year's census.

But that's not the way it works. So, when the numbers are in, we will go down from seven seats to six. Then state legislators will commence logrolling and gerrymandering until the state is reapportioned to their satisfaction. It will not be a pretty sight.

It was one we might have avoided had our U.S. Sen. David Vitter persuaded his colleagues to force the Census Bureau to add a question next year asking respondents whether they are citizens of this country. Armed with that information, Vitter hoped to have aliens excluded from reapportionment calculations.

Vitter hasn't given up yet, but the odds are heavily against him.

America has, according to the Census Bureau's latest American Community survey, 22 million non-citizens, largely concentrated in a few states. Well over two-thirds of them are in California and Texas, which thus gain

Washington clout, and federal dollars, at the expense of Louisiana and other states that have relatively few residents unfamiliar with the Pledge of Allegiance.



**JAMES GILL**

Thus, with non-citizens in the count, Louisiana has 1.453 percent of the national population. But take them out and our share goes up to 1.538 percent, which Elliott Stonecipher, Louisiana demographer par excellence, figures would be more than enough to ensure that none of our estimable members of Congress would need to be sacrificed.

Vitter had the support of another Republican senator, Robert Bennett of Utah, and reeled off a list of other states that lose representation under the current system. But, with a hostile White House and Democratic Senate leadership, the issue did not come to a vote.

His opponents argue that excluding non-citizens from the reapportionment mix would be discriminatory and possibly unconstitutional. Certainly non-citizens have a lively interest in what goes on in Washington, not least in immigration law. No doubt there are principled reasons in favor of giving them as much consideration, short of a vote, as possible, especially if they are here legally.

Vitter and Stonecipher, however,

argue that American democracy should be the exclusive province of American citizens. Moral considerations aside, there is no question where Louisiana's practical interests lie. Although we are getting the shaft because we have a relatively small non-citizen population, no public officials from Gov. Bobby Jindal on down have rallied to the cause.

The Census Bureau claims that it is too late to add a citizenship question anyway. That would make it impossible to conduct the count on April 1, and assemble the data by the end of the year. Thus the bureau could not meet its legal obligation to provide the states with the information they need for reapportionment purposes by April 1, 2011. It would, moreover, cost hundreds of millions to make the change, according to the bureau.

Only a government bureaucrat could claim that adding one simple question could cause such havoc and take so long. Granted there would be extra printing costs, but it shouldn't take months to figure out how to ask whether respondents are citizens of this country. The census, which cost \$6.5 billion to conduct in 2000, is already budgeted at \$15 billion this time, so taxpayers would hardly notice the extra hit if a citizenship question were added. Besides, they might consider the money well spent.

That it won't happen may be partly

TP OCT 18 2009

Vitter's fault. His original proposal was that the Census should ask not only about citizenship but about the legal status of immigrants.

That was obviously unnecessary since the plan was that all aliens, documented or not, would not count in population statistics used for reapportionment purposes. The Vitter amendment, in its original form, would have served only to scare the illegals off and skew the Census numbers.

After Stonecipher pointed this out, Vitter removed the offending words so that the additional question would be limited to the issue of citizenship. But the battle appeared lost by then.

Reapportionment in Louisiana thus shapes up to be more of a circus than usual. Take, for instance, the task of drawing a black majority district around New Orleans. With the state down to six seats, and huge numbers still displaced after Katrina, Stonecipher avers the new district will have to stretch from the Gulf of Mexico "all the way northward, along I-10 and the Mississippi River, into at least Ascension Parish, and possibly East Baton Rouge."

Louisiana is just too American for its own good.

.....

James Gill can be reached at [jgill@timespicayune.com](mailto:jgill@timespicayune.com) or 504.826.3318.