

## Citizenship question legitimate Columnist

*Jim Beam*

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., has apparently delivered the death blow to efforts by a number of people to save one of Louisiana's seven seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Elliott Stonecipher of Shreveport, a population expert, believes that seat could be saved if persons counted in the census next year are asked whether they are citizens of this country. Everyone could be counted, he said, but only those who are citizens would be used to reapportion seats in the House.

The latest American Community survey done by the Census Bureau indicates there are 22 million noncitizens living in this country.

If noncitizen numbers are used to realign the House, states like California and Texas, where two-thirds of them live, would be the big winners. Louisiana and six other states don't have large numbers of noncitizens, and they face the loss of House seats. The other states are Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-La., agrees with Stonecipher and offered an amendment to a spending bill for the Census Bureau that would add the citizenship question to census forms. He and others had hopes Landrieu would support the effort, but she declined Tuesday. Democrats call shots

Landrieu's support was considered critical because the Democrats have the votes to kill Vitter's amendment.

The census forms and their 10 questions have already been printed, and redoing them would cost \$1 billion, Landrieu said. Changing them would be unconstitutional, she added.

"Sen. Vitter's amendment is a transparent political stunt that would do nothing to address the problem," Landrieu said. "It would require a constitutional amendment to exclude noncitizens from congressional reapportionment decisions ... It is an egregious abuse of taxpayers' dollars that I cannot support."

Six of the state's seven U.S. House members disagree. They wrote to Landrieu, pleading for her support.

"This will result in Louisiana losing one congressional seat compared to if reapportionment were based on citizens only," the six said. "So the impact on Louisiana could not be more direct or clear."

Rep. Anh "Joseph" Cao, R-New Orleans, didn't sign the letter, but he also thinks noncitizens shouldn't be counted.

Stonecipher said the citizenship question has been asked in 11 previous census counts. He also had a quick response to Landrieu for failing to support the Vitter effort.

"Whatever your opinion of your fellow senator from our state, please note that the work I and others outside the Beltway have done in this pursuit is anything but a stunt," Stonecipher said. "I would suggest to you that what we are doing — inarguably, I would say — is working for Louisiana and our nation."

Stonecipher said refusing to help indicates to him that Landrieu won't seek re-election in 2014. He is also convinced President Barack Obama and the Democrats will eventually grant legal status to undocumented residents in order to secure most of their 6 million votes in upcoming congressional and presidential elections.

Some 75 percent of noncitizens are considered sympathetic to the Democrats, he said.

The Census Bureau has bragged about this year's census questionnaire being one of the shortest ever. People will be able to complete it in about 10 minutes.

The argument by Landrieu and others that it would cost \$1 billion to change census forms seems bogus since the Census Bureau is already spending \$15 billion to conduct the count.

James Gill, a columnist for the New Orleans Times-Picayune, said that is a lot of money to spend on a census that won't even tell us how many noncitizens live in this country.

"That doesn't sound like value for money," Gill said.

One of the big puzzles of this campaign to ask people whether they are citizens is why there hasn't been more support for the effort.

Stonecipher said when we think back about the fall of 2009, we will wonder why key elected officials in Louisiana hid in the bushes when they could have united to protect their state. Vitter is controversial

The fact that Sen. Vitter spearheaded the effort turned some people off. On some issues — and too often — he quickly wears out his welcome.

At first, Vitter also wanted to ask noncitizens about their legal statuses, and that would have kept many of them from participating in the census.

Gill offered another explanation: "Civil rights and Latino groups are raising a ruckus, the New York Times has editorialized against him (Vitter) and neither the White House nor the dominant Democrats in Congress will have any truck with him."

The argument has also been made that public officials who want the citizenship question included had a lot of time to do it much earlier before the census forms were printed.

Stonecipher said U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., is expected to have the Senate kill the Vitter amendment before the week is out.

What a shame. How hard would it be to simply ask a resident if he or she is an American citizen? One of the reasons we do a census every 10 years is to establish hard facts on which to base future actions.

Someone dropped the ball here — big time.

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