# Vote NO on Expansion Referendum

Voters in Lowndes County are being asked in a referendum to vote YES or NO on expansion of the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners by the addition of two super-districts:

Shall the governing authority of Lowndes County be changed to a six-member board of commissioners to be composed of a nonvoting chairperson and five voting district commissioners, three of whom shall represent the existing three districts created by dividing Lowndes County into three districts and two of whom shall represent additional districts to be created by dividing Lowndes County into two districts which shall overlay the three existing districts?

Here is my explanation of why I am voting NO and why I think you should vote NO too.

The problem that the proposed expansion is supposed to cure is that each of the current Commissioners represents too many constituents. The current Board has just three Commissioners and a Chair for all the residents of Lowndes County. The population of Lowndes County was 92, 115 in the 2000 census, on which the current districts are based. Thus each Commissioner represents over 30,000 residents – too many people for any one commissioner to represent effectively. (The situation will get even worse after the 2010 census, which will show that the county’s population is in excess of 100,000.) One step forward then is to expand the number of commissioners.

However, the proposed expansion being voted on by referendum expands the County Commission from three districts to five districts with the addition of two super-districts, covering half the county each. Whoever is elected from each super-district would have to represent over 45,000 residents! Thus the proposed method of expanding the county commission make the problem of representing too many residents worse, not better. The two super-districts are two steps backward.

It really doesn’t help that each resident will have two county commissioners. That could have been achieved by doubling the number of commissioners in each of the existing county commission districts. Indeed the County Commission had several alternative proposals for expanding the county commission to choose from. Expansion is a good idea, but this particular proposal for expansion is not the way to go.

In particular, the proposed expansion is not reflective of the demographic diversity of Lowndes County. Lowndes County is about 34% African-American. The current three-district commission reflects that demographic with one district out of three (33%) containing a majority of residents who are minorities (a so-called “minority majority district”) Neither of the two proposed super-districts is majority minority. Proposed Super-district East is 49.66% African-American by total population, but only 45.04% by Voting Age Population. If voting in the super-districts follows racial lines, as has too often been the case, the Lowndes County Commission is likely to go from having one minority member elected from three districts (33%) to one minority member elected from five districts (20%).

It is more difficult and more expensive to campaign for election in a larger district. To increase participation in the political process, we need smaller districts, not larger ones. That was the rationale for expanding the County Commission in the first place. So let’s vote NO on the proposed expansion with super-districts and send the issue back to the County Commission to come up with a better plan for expansion.

Dennis W. Marks

Resident of Lowndes County

*The opinions expressed are the personal opinions of the author and are not expressed on behalf of any of the organizations of which he is a member.*