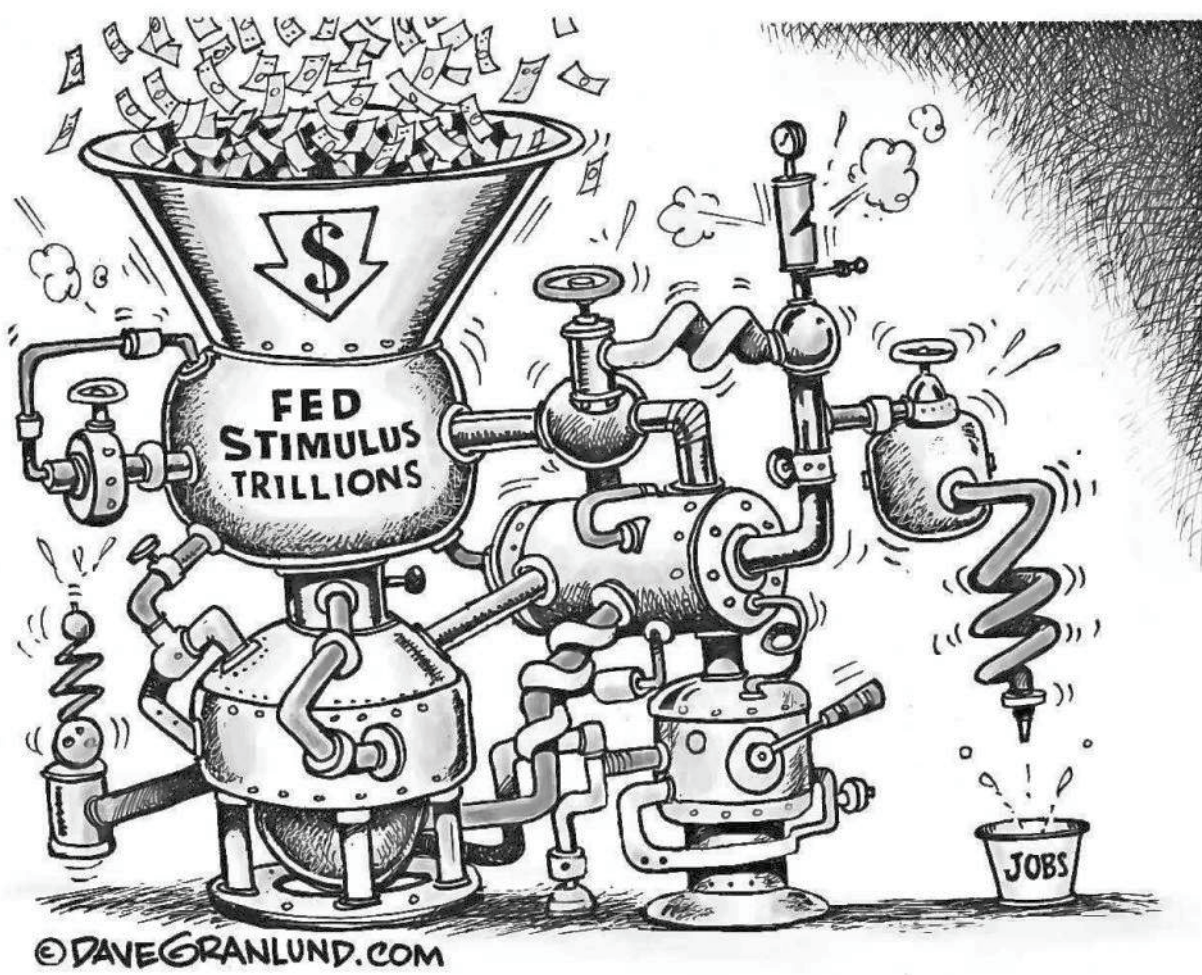


Opinion

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



DAVEGRANLUND.COM/USA TODAY NETWORK

Redistricting commission pool lacks Latino representation



Sonja Diaz
Guest columnist

The coronavirus pandemic that has put our lives and economy on hold has not slowed down the timeline to select finalists for the California Citizens Redistricting Commission from an existing pool of applicants that do not accurately represent the state's diversity or geographic population distribution.

Latinos are California's largest ethnic group at 40% of the population, yet they only represent 17% of the candidate pool that the State Auditor's office is reviewing before passing along the names of 60 Californians to the state Legislature on May 15 for the final selection round.

The redistricting commission has the important task of redrawing state and federal political boundaries, which is especially critical as the state faces a potential loss of a congressional seat after the 2020 Census count is complete.

As the list of remaining applicants stands now, Latinos are the only group that is underrepresented as the state moves to making a final selection. A global pandemic should not take our eyes off an issue that will affect Californians for the next decade. In fact, it offers a unique opportunity to take the time to get it right.

When voters chose to hand the responsibility of creating political boundaries from elected officials to citizens a decade ago, the goal was to ensure that the lines were drawn fairly so that all communities received fair representation and make it easier for diverse communities to elect their candidates of choice. The final candidate list ensures representational parity for white residents and other groups but doesn't offer fairness to Latinos.

One potential solution is to ensure that the final list of finalists takes geographic parity into account. Currently, applicants from the nine Bay Area counties make up 20% of the applicant pool, which is comparable to their share of the state's population.

This is in comparison to the underrepresentation of the state's population core — the five-county Los Angeles metro region — which has 38% of candidates

in the pool, despite representing nearly half of all Californians. Even more startling is how Sacramento has the same number of interviewees as San Diego, II, despite being half the size of the state's border county.

The lack of fair geographical representation means that Latinos, the state's largest ethnic group, are being left out of the redistricting process. As an example, the current finalist list includes residents from affluent Bay Area cities such as Piedmont and El Cerrito, while leaving out less affluent cities like San Fernando or Commerce, which have substantially larger shares of voting-age citizens and Latinos.

There is still time for the State Auditor's panel or the Legislature to take action to correct the lack of parity in representation before the final choices are made. The pandemic is not an excuse to ignore the key principle of equal participation. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic is a perfect opportunity to commit to ensuring that Latinos and other voters of color have equal access to the democratic process.

California is a national leader on social justice issues, but we cannot forget that until recently, several counties were monitored by the U.S. Department of Justice for 45 years over voting rights issues. We cannot begin to right those historical wrongs without properly including Latinos in the process. Ensuring fair representation on the redistricting commission is a necessary first step in addressing our nation and state's long history of vote dilution and discriminatory gerrymandering.

California has made it clear that accurate representation was a goal in the selection of the final commissioner panel and has done a commendable job in recruiting applicants. Despite these efforts, Latinos still stand to be left out of a historic effort to end gerrymandering and put in place political boundaries that move the state toward more fair representation.

Without proportionate representation for Latinos on the redistricting commission, we will not fulfill the promise of our most fundamental right of equal political participation. The state still has time, and a unique moment during the public health crisis, to ensure it gets it right.

Sonja Diaz is founding director of the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative, latino@luskin.ucla.edu. She wrote this commentary for CalMatters.



Your Turn
Laura E. James
Guest columnist

COVID-19 demonstrates economic development is the key to our future

Nationwide, economic developers are celebrating Economic Development Week from May 4-9. Typically, Economic Development Week in Greater Palm Springs means showcasing the success of the innovators in the iHub as well as highlighting the incremental progress we are making as we move closer to our regional priorities of establishing increased bandwidth, a four-year university offering an array of STEM degrees, and increased access to equity investments for startup companies.

In 2020, celebrating Economic Development Week in Greater Palm Springs means something very different. COVID-19 has suddenly brought the economy to the forefront of thought. People are now acutely aware that most of our usual daily activities are the very things that comprise our economy. Whether downloading software from a major corporation, planning a trip, placing an online order, or buying from the restaurant on the corner, our activities contribute to the flow of money through the economy. As long as enough of it flows through our hands, we are relatively secure.

But COVID-19 has turned off the faucet for an overwhelming number of people in the Coachella Valley.

"Cutting economic development funding while in the midst of an economic crisis would yield the same results as cutting off water to a garden just as it was beginning to look parched."

We now see that horrible things can happen even when we seem to be doing everything right.

Economic developers are charged with facilitating the creation of wealth and opportunity; how this is achieved varies depending on many factors. Speaking broadly, economic developers in every region work

from a vast repertoire of established best practices. The best economic developers use those practices as a baseline, but think like entrepreneurs: they seek out new opportunities, especially in places where opportunity is thought not to exist.

It is this combination of best practices and innovative thinking that led the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) to establish its platform of key regional priorities back in 2017. Since then, every presentation that we've given has revolved around diversifying our regional economy: the one that is so dependent on tourism and hospitality that nearly a third of our residents may soon be out of work.

Importantly, real economic development means playing a long game. Short-term wins are a psychological boost, but don't necessarily offer the kind of stability that people need for the long-term. Right now, economic developers have put long-term plans on hold to help businesses address the urgent matters of staying afloat during a complete or partial shutdown. Like many others, we hope that this phase of mitigation is soon safely behind us so we can begin working on true recovery.

What concerns economic developers is the knowledge that businesses and individuals are not the only ones who are suffering financially from this crisis. Governments will find their budgets severely squeezed, as well. Funds for all planned activities may simply not be available, and it will be tempting for local governments to divert funds from economic development. Cutting economic development funding while in the midst of an economic crisis would yield the same results as cutting off water to a garden just as it was beginning to look parched.

In fact, economic gardening is the term used to refer to growing a successful economy from within — just as Palm Springs, Palm Desert, Indio, and CVEP are doing with the iHub network. If economic developers can count on stable long-term funding in alignment with long-term goals, perhaps during Economic Development Week 2021 we will be celebrating successes we haven't yet conceived of.

Email Laura E. James, CVEP's vice president of innovation, at Laura@cvep.com.

YOUR VOICE

Open letter on COVID-19 policy

To the Riverside County Board of Supervisors,
We are four council members from two diverse and dynamic Coachella Valley cities with many businesses and workers affected by COVID-19 and its consequences.

Having watched the Board of Supervisors meeting of May 5, 2020, six conclusions seem clear:

- 1 Everyone wants to begin re-opening more businesses in an orderly way.
- 2 The public's confidence in their safety will be key to the success of any re-opening.
- 3 The current orders of the County Health Officer will HELP achieve the reopening of businesses by providing assurance of safety to the state and residence.
- 4 This is particularly true of the order regarding social/physical distancing and the wearing of mass/face coverings. People who feel just fine can spread the virus with an unexpected cough or sneeze. If we

all continue wearing face coverings, it will contain those unexpected coughs or sneezes and help us all feel safe.

5 Enforcement is a non-issue and does not need a Board action. Social pressure has proven to be a very effective enforcement mechanism, as a clear majority of the public understand the need for face covering and social distancing.

6 Public confidence will be enhanced if best practices continue to be defined by the County Health Officer without political influence and based upon continuing scientific input and professional judgment.

We urge the Board of Supervisors to embrace these conclusions as the best way to unify all who are voicing concerns.

Grace Garner and Lisa Middleton, Palm Springs City Council, Kathleen Kelly and Jan Harnik, Palm Desert City Council

Look on the bright side

We live in free country, and although we may be social distancing in isolation, we have to see the forest through the trees. We can read what we want, send emails to anyone without them being censored, and we have plenty of time to pass around some good information and jokes. I have three Zoom calls a week with friends who are adding to my knowledge base.

I think we have moved closer to our families and friends, and appreciate them even more so at this time. I have greater appreciation of utilizing free time on a constructive basis. We are in our homes eating good food with the ones we love, and not spending a lot of money on gas. We have books, newspapers, and beautiful gardens and mountains to look at.

Let's count our blessings, and try to be positive every day. I know I will.

Alan Goldstein, Rancho Mirage