

MINUTES OF CITIZENS ADVISORY FORUM: April 16, 2011

Members present: State Senator Curt Thompson (*presiding*) and Louise Johnson Chief Of Staff. All others are listed on the sign in sheet.

OPENING REMARKS:

Curt shared with us the redistricting process. According to 2010 Census figures, equal representation in Georgia on the state senate level means that each senate district ought to be composed of 170,000 residents. Using this formula, our State Senate District 5 will actually grown in territory because our present configuration is short of 7,500 residents. (Even though Georgia has grown in population, our SD 5 had more of its share of foreclosures and economic problems. We lost a little in our population.) Other important Census-based facts are: 61% of Curt's constituents live in apartments; 120 languages are spoken at home; and 48% of all Curt's constituents self-identify as Latin o.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

None

MEETING TOPICS:

Racial Profiling.

Curt outlined what we can expect if and when Governor Deal signs HB 87 into law. All businesses employing over ten people are to use e-Verify to determine the citizenship of all their employees and applicants, we can expect a 3% error rate in just Anglo-Saxon appearing people. Empirical e-Verify data is even worse for people, who look like they may be of foreign extraction.

Curt introduced our guest speaker State Senator Vincent Fort. Fort is in his 15th year of public service as a Georgia state senator, and he represents a district that includes parts of Atlanta and East Point. He attended two out of the four hearings, which Curt presided over in different regions of Georgia.

Fort told us about the slave codes in Georgia law that were designed to control the behavior of slaves on plantations. Then after Emancipation and into the 20th Century, slave codes transformed into curfew-type "black" codes, which were clearly meant to restrict the movement of African-Americans.

Fast forward to today's campaign to enact anti-(illegal) immigration laws and we now have some people's objective to abuse other people's civil rights on a regular basis. "Is this the country we want?" Fort asks.

The biggest disappointment Fort experienced in his time in the state senate dated back to 2002 when Georgia was on the cusp of passing into the law the most far-reaching ANTI-racial profiling measure in the country. It passed the state house and it reached the floor of the state senate. It called for a constitutional majority in both houses to be

then approved by voters in a statewide referendum. 29 votes in the affirmative were needed in the state senate. Fort says that we could probably have seen it codified in our state constitution, had it not been for the fact that two north Georgia white senators took a walk while the voting was taking place. 29 affirmative votes were needed; only 27 were recorded and the bill died on the spot.

The best thing we can do to combat support for racial profiling is to educate our community, Fort states. Racial profiling used to be a white-versus-black thing. Now with a browning of America, it has evolved into an anti-Latino thing. Most Georgians do not realize that the Arizona law that is held up in federal courts is 95% of what HB 87 calls for. HB 87 that awaits the signature of Governor Deal is, in fact, even stronger, and there is no guarantee that a federal court will even issue an injunction against its imminent enforcement. Deal is expected to sign it, not only because he campaigned on the issue of illegal immigration, but also he commented that the stronger version that passed meets “most criteria for needed change”.

At the regional hearings over HB 87, the most passionate voices against the bill were those of Latinos already naturalized and legal, who were routinely profiled at traffic stops, along with any and all passengers in their vehicles. More Georgians need to be made aware of the burdens posed to their fellow citizens and by any official boycott in protest. Fort encourages us to get involved in the political process, especially in our county where Obama won 47% of the Presidential election vote in 2008. Gwinnett is becoming more and more minorities majority in population, as well.

Curt commented that a governor’s signature of approval on HB 87 will “torpedo” any chance that a major league soccer team will establish themselves in metro Atlanta. Already one such MLS team was checking out four sites for a new stadium. Two of those four sites are in Gwinnett, and one of those two would actually be in our state senate district. Because the typical soccer fan is internationally minded, the fan base would probably be supportive of a boycott movement and, thus, we would lose out on the hundreds of millions of dollars associated with the establishment of a MLS team, along with the operating revenue—like construction, concessions, night life.

To put it in broader terms about the direction our local economy is heading, Curt says “we’re becoming Birmingham; whereas Charlotte will become the next Atlanta.”

NEXT MEETING:

Our next CAF meeting is scheduled on Saturday, May 21, 2011 at 10:30 a.m. in Café 45. Curt plans to do a Legislative Wrap-up.

Meeting Minutes Recorded
By D Marlin Knapp

Edited
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