

News

Asian American population grows fastest among ethnic groups

Thursday, March 31, 2011

By Dave Phillips
For the Daily Tribune

A significant increase in Asian Americans residing in Michigan — and specifically Oakland County — could have an effect on legislative redistricting.

While reacting to the news that Michigan's Asian American population increased faster than any other ethnic group between 2000-2010, members of the nonprofit group Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote-Michigan vowed to make their voices heard during the redistricting process.

"We are going to be making sure the Legislature, when we go to county commissioners, knows that we are growing and becoming more and more organized as a political voice in Michigan," said Sally Kim, redistricting coordinator for the group.

"We look forward to becoming more organized as a political voice and increasing contacts with the state Legislature and local legislature to make sure they know we are here growing and operating."

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 68,082 Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Oakland County - the most of any county in Michigan. A total of 238,199 Asian Americans (not including Pacific Islander) live in the state, marking an increase of 34.9 percent from 2000 to 2010.

The U.S. Census defines "Asian" as persons having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

That growth was slightly higher than that of the Hispanic/Latino population, which grew by 34.7 percent in the same time span.

Those numbers surprised the volunteer-based group, which also focuses on voter education and civic engagement, candidate forums and immigration issues.

"We knew we were growing fast, but we didn't know we were growing faster than the Hispanic and Latino population," Kim said.

"News around the state about what type of immigrants are in the state seemed to be geared around Hispanics."

Kim said the numbers aren't exactly accurate yet, either; they did not take into account those who are partially Asian American and are two or more mixed races.

The number of Asian Americans in that group is "pretty big," Kim said.

Though the large numbers will give the group and Asian Americans some added clout as far as redistricting is concerned, the

census results will not affect the way Kim approaches her job. APIA Vote-Michigan chose seven counties to target as part of the redistricting process before the census results were released.

Oakland tops list

“Oakland County is our number one target because we have the largest population there,” Kim said.

“My county, Oakland County, has the highest number of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans compared to any other county in Michigan,” stated Nancy Yan, board member of APIA Vote-Michigan.

“I want to make sure that Asian American voices are included during the redistricting process so that my vote will count in election years to come,” Yan stated.

Michigan will lose one of its 15 congressional seats due to declining overall population during the past decade.

Districts must be redrawn by November, and some have speculated that Republicans will redraw districts to pit current Democratic U.S. Rep. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, and Sander Levin, D-Royal Oak, against each other, eliminating one seat held by Democrats in time for the 2012 election.

Kim said APIA Vote-Michigan plans on participating in the Michigan Citizens' Redistricting Competition, which will begin in April.

The contest, which all Michigan citizens are invited to participate in, will provide access to data, software, legal instruction and other tools, according to the website michiganredistricting.org.

“Maps that comply with relevant state and federal laws will then be scored based upon objective criteria,” reads a statement on that website.

“The winning plans that best meet the objective criteria will be submitted to the Michigan Legislature for consideration.”

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