

BIAS IS CHARGED IN REDISTRICTING OF LOS ANGELES

By Judith Cummings
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The Justice Department today filed a suit seeking to overturn a 1982 redistricting plan that it says deprived Hispanic residents of adequate political representation on the City Council.

The suit, which names Mayor Tom Bradley, the City Council and the City Clerk as defendants, charges that the redistricting plan was drawn up to split Hispanic voters to reduce their strength in Council districts. The suit, a civil action, says the plan violates the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Hispanic people make up more than 27 percent of the city's population, according to the Government's figures, but have no representation on the 15-member City Council.

Third Suit by Administration

"The fracturing of the Hispanic communities" was accomplished "notwithstanding the availability of alternate redistricting proposals that more accurately reflected the Hispanic population increases over the decade," the suit said.

District lines were drawn, it said, "for the purpose and with the result of avoiding the higher Hispanic percentages" that would have resulted from setting district boundaries "on a nonracial basis."

Eleven of the 15 Council members are white, three are black and one is Asian-American.

The suit, filed by William Bradford Reynolds, Assistant Attorney General for civil rights, is the third by the Administration involving a major city.

A 1981 suit on behalf of black and Hispanic residents of New York City resulted in the redrawing of Councilmanic districts. The Justice Department also intervened in a suit over minority voting rights in Chicago; negotiations aimed at settling the suit are continuing, a spokesman for Mr. Reynolds said.

The Los Angeles suit comes as rival Hispanic candidates campaign in a special election to fill the City Council seat representing a district whose population is 77 percent Hispanic. It is the only district with a Hispanic majority.

The incumbent, Art Snyder, a Democrat, announced Sept. 30 that he would step down. The nonpartisan election will be held Dec. 10.

Welcomed by Hispanic Leaders

Hispanic political leaders hailed the suit. Virginia Reade, director of the Mexican-American Political Association in Los Angeles, who noted that there were also no Hispanic members of

the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, said it should have been brought "long, long ago."

"If you have adequate political representation, then your issues will be dealt with," she said.

Victoria Pipkin, a spokesman for Mayor Bradley, said he would not comment on the suit's charges but said, "The Mayor is a long-time supporter of increased Hispanic representation on the council." If the suit results in increased Council representation for Hispanic residents, "we're all for it," she said.

The president of the City Council, Pat Russell, denied that the redistricting was intended to weaken the Hispanic vote. "It's nonsense," she said. "There's been no policy like that in this city. Both the Mayor and the Council have been very concerned."

John Hartmire, a spokesman for Mrs. Russell, said ethnicity was only one of a dozen or more factors that by law had to be taken into consideration in redistricting.

An Hispanic candidate is considered likely to win the special election. The leading contenders are Richard Alatorre, a California assemblyman; Steven Rodriguez, an urban planner; Antonion Rodriguez, a civil rights lawyer who heads the Center for Law and Justice; and Gil Avilar, a former aide to Gov. George Deukmejian, a Republican.

Growth in Hispanic Population

The City Council adopted the 1982 redistricting plan based on results of the 1980 census. The department said that from 1970 to 1980, the city's Hispanic population grew to 27.5 percent of the total from 18.4 percent. The Government asserted that in this century, only one Hispanic person, Edward R. Roybal, a Democrat now in the House of Representatives, had been elected to the Council.

The suit would force the Council to draw new district lines. The Government also asked that redistricting plans devised over the next 10 years be submitted to the Justice Department or the court for approval.

John Huerta, a Los Angeles lawyer who was a member of Californios for Fair Representation, a Hispanic group critical of the redistricting, said that while the suit was meritorious, the Administration's decision to file it reflected some political motivation.

"The record of this Administration has been poor on behalf of blacks, Latinos and women," he said. "In 1988 there'll be another Presidential election and this will give the Reagan Administration the opportunity to say they've done something good for Latinos," he said. ----
Ruling Expected in Chicago The case against Chicago's City Council, accused of discriminating against blacks and Hispanic-Americans in the way it redrew the boundaries of city wards, is being litigated. A Federal District Court is expected to rule soon on a proposed redistricting that would increase minority voting representation in seven of the city's 50 wards.

In New York City, the 1981 City Council election was called off after the Justice Department found a proposed realignment discriminatory under the Voting Rights Act.

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