



Southward Advocates Better Representation

Wednesday, February 2, 2011

LINDEN — Carmen Southward, of Linden, was among 225 in attendance at a reapportionment commission hearing held in the Toms River Municipal Building on Saturday.

Commission members will map out 40 state legislative districts for use in the June 7 Democratic and Republican primary elections, when all 120 legislators are on the ballot.

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“I’d like to voice better representation for Latinos,” said Southward, who is of Cuban heritage. “I don’t think our views are well-represented.”

According to preliminary Census figures, New Jersey’s Latino population increased from 13.3 percent 10 years ago to 16.7 percent in 2010.

Union County is 26.3 percent Latino origin, 22.6 percent Black, 4.6 percent Asian and 46.9 percent non-Hispanic white, but most of its representatives in Trenton are white men.

Women constituted 54 percent of voters in the 2008 elections but only 25 percent of state legislators, according to a report from the Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

The average number of female state legislators dropped by 1 percent nationally, following the 2010 election because 70 percent of women in legislatures are Democrats.

New Jersey has 9 women in the Senate and a record 21 women in the Assembly, or 30 out of 120 lawmakers representing the state.

From an economic standpoint, legislators are also out of touch with the population. Median household income in New Jersey in 2008 was \$67,127 but lawmakers are paid \$49,000 for a part time job and they tend to be wealthy.

Composed of five Democrats and five Republicans, the reapportionment commission has always failed to agree on districts without a tie-breaking member as part of the commission.

The commission invited Rutgers professor Alan Rosenthal to begin attending hearings, even though an 11th member could be appointed only by state Chief Justice Stuart Rabner.

Two more public hearings are currently planned for Feb. 9 in Newark and Feb. 13 in Jersey City.

Democrats and Republicans have traditionally redrawn legislative district maps to produce skewed election results favoring one party or the other.