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AS WE HEARD IT

by PATRICK MANTEIGA

ulation is 1,180,784 with 396,262 living in cities and 784,522 living in the unincorporated county.

For these 784,522 people, a county commissioner is their most local elected official. They must get that commissioner's attention if they have a need or complaint regarding water, garbage, parks, roads, services or a lost dog. The problem is that unlike their city counterparts, their elected officials must deal with overwhelming masses of population.

Each of the three at-large commissioners, Jim Norman, Mark Sharpe and Kevin Beckner, serve more people than the governors of seven states:
 Wyoming - 532,668
 Vermont - 621,270
 North Dakota - 641,481
 Alaska - 686,293
 South Dakota - 804,194
 Delaware - 873,092
 Rhode Island - 1,050,785
Hillsborough County - 1,180,784

Our single-member district county commissioners have fewer constituents, but the size of their population and geographic area is still daunting. On average, Kevin White, Rose Ferlita, Ken

eliminated their at-large members and gone to just single-member districts, and all of the top seven counties except for us and Pinellas have six or more single-member districts.

In fact, Pinellas County is the only one that has the same system of county government, but there is a big difference between us and them. Pinellas has 24 cities that represent 64 percent of the population. So most in Pinellas benefit from elected officials who live, work and shop in their community and have an intimate understanding of their population's needs and challenges.

There are many other reasons to expand the commission. Dividing the pie by six instead of four would create geographically smaller districts. East Hillsborough County's giant district could be cut in two, giving those south of the Alafia River their own district and commissioner. Brandon would get more attention.

Dividing the county by six instead of four would likely create a prominently Hispanic district. Hispanic population in this county is at 23 percent or 259,772. There

County	Population	County Commission	Pop. Per single member	Administrator
Miami-Dade	2,398,245	13 single member	184,480	Elected
Broward	1,751,234	9 single member	194,581	Appointed
Palm Beach	1,265,293	7 single member	180,756	Appointed
Hillsborough	1,180,784	3 at large/4 single	295,196	Appointed
Orange	1,072,801	6 single member	178,800	Elected
Pinellas	910,280	3 at large/4 single	227,565	Appointed
Duval	850,962	5 at large/ 14 single	60,783	Appointed
Proposed Change				
Hillsborough	1,180,784	3 at large/6 single	196,797	Appointed?

Hagan and Al Higginbotham serve 295,000 people each. That is close to the constituency of the Mayor of Tampa, who has 340,882 constituents. But in the mayor's case, her constituents can seek help from the city council, which has three at-large members and four single-member districts. This allows a more immediate and closer relationship because a single-member city councilperson has only 85,220 constituents.

Hillsborough County is an anomaly in the state of Florida. Our county-wide commissioners serve more people than any other commissioners in the state and single-member district commissioners have a larger constituency than any other single-member district commissioner in the state.

We've compared the top seven counties in the chart above. All of the counties larger than us have

no commissioner with an Hispanic surname on the commission and only one during the history of the present system has been elected, and she was Afro-Cuban and elected in the prominently Black, single-member district.

The absence of Hispanics on the county commission, now and in the past, speaks volumes of the need for a new system that can foster diversity and eliminate the mechanisms of discrimination.

The Charter Review Board will discuss this proposal on Monday, June 6, starting at 6 p.m. on the 2nd floor of the County Center. If you feel the same way I do on the issue, please come out in support and speak during the public comments section at the beginning of the meeting.

 On Monday, this writer spoke to the Charter Review Board on the idea of expanding the county commission. My goal is to bring commissioners closer to their constituents, make them more accountable and bring more diversity to the commission's make-up. I proposed keeping the three at-large, county-wide county commission seats and increasing our four single-member district seats to six. The new board would then have nine county commissioners.

Hillsborough County is unusual compared to many urban counties in that we have very few cities, Tampa, Plant City and Temple Terrace. Hillsborough's total pop-