

## Professor Rosenthal...Breaks the Tie

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By Steve Adubato, Jr. | March 10th, 2011 - 2:13pm

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Professor Alan Rosenthal was my mentor at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University in the early 1980s. Later, when I was pursuing a PhD, it was Dr. Rosenthal who encouraged me many times not to quit. His advice paid off.

For his entire academic career, the 78-year-old Rutgers professor has been helpful to so many others. He is a great professor, a really funny guy, but most of all, has the ability to step in and mediate in difficult situations. It is for these and many other reasons that Professor Rosenthal, the country's top scholar when it comes to state legislatures, has been asked once again to be the 11th and tie-breaking member on a redistricting commission that inevitably will reach a stalemate.

Every 10 years, this redistricting commission, with five Democrats and five Republicans, meet to draw up boundaries for legislative districts. Every 10 years, they get stuck in the same place. They reach a stalemate because neither the Democrats nor the Republicans want to give an inch. Redrawing district lines has the potential of giving one party or legislative candidate an advantage over another. Historically, it has had nothing to do with fair or equal representation, and everything to do with partisan and often petty politics.

Ten years ago, the commission reached a stalemate and called in Professor Rosenthal. He broke the tie and the legislative districts were drawn. This year, he is doing it again. Said Rosenthal recently in a *Star-Ledger* front page story; "It's a great responsibility because you're casting a vote for a map that's going to affect members of the Legislature, people who want to run for the Legislature and, indirectly, citizens as well...Yet nobody is going to die as a result of me voting for a Democratic map or me voting for a Republican map."

The funny thing about Rosenthal is that not only does he love studying state legislatures, he has respect for individual legislators. He told the *Star-Ledger*; "I think people are unduly cynical towards politics and politicians, partly because — well, more than partly because of the media."

Rosenthal respects people who serve in government, but the irony is that if those members of the legislature and other politicians actually acted more like statesmen, there would be no need for him to step in and ultimately decide what New Jersey's legislative districts should look like.

I'm convinced that Alan Rosenthal has no horse in this race. He is not rooting for the Democrats or the Republicans, but rather for fairness and compromise. It is interesting that the idea of compromise has gotten a bad name in the highly partisan and nasty political environment we live in. Politicians stake out opinions and positions set in stone. They confuse being strident with demonizing their opponent with some convoluted sense of being principled.

Yet, the legislative process by nature is about compromise, give and take, and reaching consensus. So, it is just a little bit ironic that those who have been charged with the responsibility of redrawing the legislative map in New Jersey clearly fail every decade to do what they are charged to do and reach out to an unelected academic like Alan Rosenthal to save their behinds. I say, ten years from now let's not waste all this time and money by going through this charade thinking that five Democrats and five Republicans can agree on any legislative redistricting map. Just call in Professor Rosenthal from day one, and in a few days, I bet he'll draw a legislative map that will achieve the redistricting commission's objectives. By then, Rosenthal will be 88 and I am sure he will be just as witty, funny, smart and youthful as ever.

Alan Rosenthal doesn't seek any attention or fame for the role he plays, but without people like him, I'm convinced that no equally divided group of Democrats and Republicans in this state can achieve what he does alone. I'm proud to have been one of the many students for whom he served as a mentor. One can only hope that the politicians who he studies and those who he saves every decade in New Jersey can learn a little bit from the good professor as well.

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