

VOTING

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about the idea. And on Wednesday, he confirmed that, in the final analysis, the concept of super districts "had all the faults of at-large elections."

However, lawyers defending the at-large voting of the City of Peoria, Peoria School District 150 and the Peoria Park District said Craven told them he was withdrawing the offer because his clients have since objected to it.

Craven refused to comment on that, citing the confidentiality between attorney and client.

Although he represents all Peoria blacks in the class-action case, Craven confers with a half-dozen blacks named as plaintiffs in three separate lawsuits.

His compromise proposal first was outlined late last month, during a meeting that included the mediator, Craven's law partner-son and just one of the named plaintiffs.

"I agree that we were talking about it, but that's all we were doing," Craven said Wednesday.

The defense lawyers said Craven's offer was so concrete that

he and his son had promised more than once to provide more details in writing, as well as a map to illustrate the complex two-tiered system.

"We found the concept interesting and we found it discussable," Casey said. "But what the facts are is that it was a mirage."

Craven countered by saying that he has kept his promise to forward a proposal to the mediator. The proposal, he said, reaffirms his all-or-nothing negotiating position with a few minor variations.

If the defendants agree to his original demand for replacing at-large voting with conventional geographical districts, he said, he will drop plans to seek a special area-wide election and he will agree to an immediate ceiling on legal fees.

Asked whether that is his final offer, Craven said, "What other options are there?"

Although it is not clear whether the defense lawyers knew of the variations in that offer before their press conference, they scoffed at the idea that they would agree to a settlement constructed around Craven's original demands.

Said Casey: "What he wants to negotiate are the terms of surrender rather than a compromise."