

POLITICS

Races start for U.S. House seats with borders unknown

All 60 seats in the state House and at least half of the 30 state Senate seats will be up for election

By GARY A. WARNER

Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The 2022 campaigns for Oregon's congressional seats have started — despite no maps to tell what part of the state they might represent.

Oregon will have six congressional seats up for grabs on the 2022 ballot — one more than in 2020. But Halloween decorations will be up by the time there is any official inkling of what and who goes where.

The 2020 U.S. Census seized up under pressure of counting in communities hit by COVID-19. The once-a-decade detailed data the state requires to draw new political maps has always — always — arrived by April 1 of the following year.

Not in this year. Pandemics play hell with politics.

The data is now due Aug. 16.

Oregon doesn't let candidates file for the 2022 elections until Sept. 9, 2021. By then about all U.S. House candidates will know is they will represent an average of 706,209 people under the 2022 math. But where — north, south, east or west — the throng in each district lives will still be undecided.

On the day the Secretary of State in Salem throws open the window to file, the 11 lawmakers who are supposed to be making the new political maps will be an hour's drive south — in Eugene — holding a hearing on what they



The Associated Press, File

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should do about redistricting. For those in Salem eager to sign up — which district to go for is anyone's guess.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, has it easiest. He's seeking another six-year term in the Senate seat he's held since 1996. A U.S. Senator represents the whole state — no district border problem then.

But it's still going to be a crapshoot for all 60 seats in the state House, and at least half of the 30 state Senate seats will be up for election. The lines will get scrambled to reflect changes in population and demographics since the last census in 2010. But at least the overall number of seats won't change.

Not true for Congress. The five U.S. House incumbents for Oregon — four Democrats and one

Republican — have started raising money for bids to return to Capitol Hill.

The five will still have to make guesses about how their districts might swell, shrink or stretch, because population shifts. Bend and suburban Portland have boomed. The area east of the Cascades and Southwest Oregon have not kept pace.

On top of it all, they'll have to make room for a sixth seat Oregon awarded in April because of its population increase since 2010 (California lost a seat for the first time in its history).

The late district drawing does come with a calming asterisk for congressional incumbents and hopefuls. Unlike state lawmakers, members of the U.S. House aren't legally required to live in their

ONLINE

See this story at lagrandeobserver.com for details on who is seeking re-election and how much cash they have on hand.

districts — just the state.

Willamette Week recently cited a Washington Post story from 2017 reporting 21 of the 435 House members at that time were registered to vote outside their districts.

Candidates for the legislature and Congress face a confusing mix-and-match of rules.

All must file to vote with the Oregon Secretary of State beginning next month.

But both state and federal candidates are free to raise money earlier.

They just have to sign up with different watchdogs.

Legislative campaign financing is handled by the Oregon Secretary of State. The state's open-ended campaign fundraising laws are legendary around the country: unlimited money from any single source to any candidate as long as it is reported to the Election's Division.

Congressional candidates have to raise funds under stricter rules controlled by the Federal Election Commission. The size, though not the number, of contributions is regulated.

Voters for Congress also get an earlier look on who is serious about running.

Despite the state's official Sept. 9 starting date

for filing, the FEC requires a "statement of candidacy" before 2022 fundraising can get started.

When will this mess get fixed? Not this summer.

But when it does, it will be a sprint, not a marathon. If and when the absurdly late census data arrives Aug. 16, there will then be expert analysis, public hearings, debate, revisions, a proposal sent to the House and Senate for approval, then on to Gov. Kate Brown for approval or veto.

All in six weeks to do what is normally done in three months.

A special session of the Legislature on Sept. 20 is supposed to ratify the plan. It has to be through the House, Senate and governor's office in time to be in the laps of the Oregon Supreme Court one week later — Sept. 27.

If all goes well, legislative and congressional districts 2022 will be more or less known by the beginning of October.

Unless the Legislature can't agree.

Or Brown doesn't approve their work.

Then comes Plan B — and things get even more confusing.

Legislative redistricting would go to Secretary of State Shemia Fagan to draw maps and get them to the court.

But not the U.S.

House seats. The Oregon Supreme Court will create a five-member judicial panel with one jurist drawn from each of the five cur-

rent districts.

There are other ifs and buts, deadlines and possible delays from court challenges.

But the bottom-line goal is for the drawing, squabbling and court challenges to be done with time to spare before the March 8 deadline for candidates to file for office.

The quicker the maps are finished, the longer candidates and voters will get a chance to figure out who and what and where they are voting for in the May 17 primary.

That circles back around to the campaign finance reporting split. Candidates for state offices have to regularly report how much they have raised and spent — usually within 30 days, but close to election time, it's 7 days.

Congress reports four times a year — once every three months. The latest report came in June 30. The filings say who is running, how much they raised this year, how much they spent, plus "cash on hand." The latter figure can often be the largest because it is money that incumbents roll over from their last campaigns.

The latest FEC report is a very, very early snapshot of who is in, who is out, who has money, who is spending. There will likely be dozens more candidates and surely millions more dollars. And remember, that doesn't count the outside spending by outside groups that is harder to regulate.

Taxpayers foot \$100,000 bill for governor's political consultant

By HILLARY BORRUD

The Oregonian

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown is on track to spend more than \$100,000 in taxpayer funds for one of her longtime advisers to serve as a part-time political consultant.

Under an arrangement dating back to early 2020, Brown hired her former communications director, Chris Pair, through a no-bid state contract at a rate of \$6,500 a month to attend weekly meetings of the Western Governors' Association on expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, the governor's signature initiative during her time as chair of the group. So far the state has paid Pair \$91,000 under the contract, according to the governor's press secretary.

During the same time, Brown also paid Pair an undisclosed amount through her political action committee for work that she has declined to describe, beyond saying it was unrelated to state business.

Brown did not disclose that Pair might be hired back on the state's dime as a consultant when a reporter asked about the longtime communications director's departure at a Jan. 17, 2020, press conference.

"We're continuing to work together in other capacities," the governor said of Pair. But she refused to say what that work was because she said the duties "don't have to



Craig Mitchell/der/The Associated Press, File

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announces the end of the state's COVID-19 restrictions in Portland on Wednesday, June 30, 2021. In July it was reported that Brown will be spending more than \$100,000 in taxpayer funds for one of her longtime advisers to serve as a part-time political consultant.

do with stateside at this point" and were paid for by her political action committee.

A month later, the governor's staff asked state procurement officials to prepare a no-bid contract worth up to \$150,000 for Pair's consulting company, Althea, so that Pair could assist with Oregon's share of work on the Western Governors' Association electric vehicle recommendations, according to public records. The contract called for the state to pay Pair \$78,000 a year, roughly half the \$158,000 salary he previously earned as the governor's communications director and senior adviser.

Brown declined to comment on why it was necessary and beneficial

to taxpayers for her to hire her former staffer through a no-bid contract. Pair also did not respond to calls for comment.

Liz Merah, press secretary for the governor, wrote in an email that Brown had tasked Pair with developing her initiative for the Western Governors' Association when he was still her communications director, so "when Chris chose to move on from the governor's office in late 2019," Brown asked Pair to complete the work.

Merah said Pair's state-paid work for the governor has been strictly separated from any other political work he does for Brown. "All work performed by Althea LLC under this contract is related to the Western Governors' Association," Merah wrote.

Judge refuses to block digging at lithium mine on NV-OR line

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — A federal judge has denied environmentalists' request for a court order temporarily blocking the government from digging trenches for archaeological surveys at a mine planned near the Nevada-Oregon line with the biggest known U.S. deposit of lithium.

U.S. District Judge Miranda Du also said in an 11-page ruling late Friday, July 23, in Reno that four conservation

groups failed to prove the trenches planned across a total of one-quarter acre would cause irreparable harm to critical habitat for imperiled sage grouse.

She said she plans to rule later this week on a request from a Nevada tribe to join the legal battle as a co-plaintiff and seek a similar restraining order based on claims the digging would disturb sacred burial grounds.

Du emphasized she intends to issue a decision on the merits of the

overall case by early next year. She noted any construction of the mine itself is unlikely to begin before the snow melts in the spring of 2022.

Lithium Nevada Corp.'s proposed Thacker Pass mine south of the Oregon line is emerging as a key battleground in the debate over environmental trade-offs tied to President Joe Biden's push for renewable energy.

Lithium is a key component in electric vehicle batteries.

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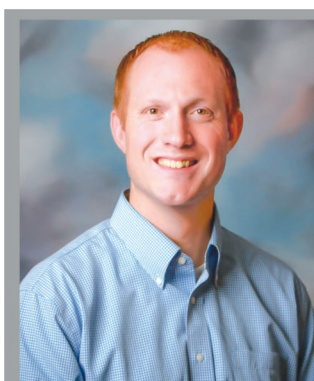


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