

POLITICS

Fagan unveils plan to set up board

By **DICK VANDERHART**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — If the last 110 years are any indication, Secretary of State Shemia Fagan could have a big say in the makeup of Oregon state House and Senate districts for the next decade.

While state lawmakers technically get the first crack at drawing new political districts every 10 years, they have succeeded in passing a legal plan just twice since 1911. If they fail this year, the hugely important job of creating state legislative maps falls to Fagan. But the Democratic secretary says she'll have help.

In step with a pledge she made on the campaign trail last year, Fagan is planning to form a "People's Commission" to offer thoughts on what maps should look like, should the job fall to her.

"Our goal is that our commission will reflect the regional diversity of Oregon, the racial and ethnic diversity of Oregon, and really provide that input," Fagan said in an interview Wednesday, suggesting the process would be the "most inclusive" Oregon has ever seen in a redistricting effort.

Beginning Thursday, Aug. 5, Fagan's office is opening up a web portal where Oregonians can apply for the new committee, which would only be convened if lawmakers fail to pass their own plans.

To qualify, applicants must be at least 16 and have lived in Oregon since April 2020. But there are a lot of things potential commissioners can't be, too: current or recent lawmakers, current or recent lobbyists, candidates for office, and legislative or party staff.

Depending on how many applicants it receives, the Secretary of State's Office plans to select up to 20 commission members, with a focus on people with diverse experience and backgrounds, and a goal to include people from all five of Oregon's congressional districts. Commissioners will be paid for their time — \$100 per half day, and \$150 per full day — and be expected to attend a training, five public hearings, and a final "debrief" meeting to offer input.

States throughout the country have increasingly opted to take the job of drawing political maps from lawmakers with a vested interest in that process and put it in the hands of independent redistricting commissions.

Typically these commissions contain the same amount of Republicans and Democrats to guard against attempts to draw maps in either party's favor. Depending on the state, they also might include people not affiliated with any major party.

Washington, California, and Idaho have all adopted a commission model for redistricting, but a campaign last year that would have asked Oregon voters to approve such a system failed to gather enough signatures. Supporters are now hoping to place the question on the 2022 ballot, with the goal of forcing a fresh redistricting process if voters approve. Meanwhile, minority Republicans have called for Democratic lawmakers to send a commission proposal to voters on their own, but have found little interest.

Umatilla County farmer pitches in to fight fire

Lloyd Piercy helps fight Elbow Creek Fire in Wallowa County

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

ECHO — Lloyd Piercy was looking for a bit of adventure.

Piercy, who turns 70 on Aug. 12, spent the last few weeks helping fight the Elbow Creek Fire with a team of more than 400 firefighters in the Blue Mountains near Troy. A self-described adrenaline junky, he drove a bulldozer and cleared roads and cut fire breaks for fire crews.

But it had been more than two decades since he worked for a fire department near Moses Lake, Washington.

"It was kind of fun," said Piercy, a longtime Echo resident and farmer who owns wineries outside of the town.

The fire has so far burned through roughly 22,960 acres in Oregon's Grande Ronde River Valley, according to the Oregon Department of



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Echo farmer Lloyd Piercy poses for a portrait with his Caterpillar D6N on Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021, in Stanfield. Piercy spent several weeks using his bulldozer to help cut firelines and roads at the Elbow Creek Fire near Troy.

Forestry, which on Aug. 2 reported was 95% contained, up from 50% last week. The forestry department also reported its Type 1 Incident Management Team 3 handed management of the fire to a smaller Type 3 organiza-

tion on Aug. 3.

After heading up to the town of Maxville, in Wallowa County, to help a friend protect his cows from the wildfires that had begun to sweep through the nearby mountains weeks ago, Piercy

got a call from firefighters asking if he could bring his bulldozer to help them in the fight.

For more than a week, he said he was positioned at the heart of the fire, where the embers hopped over the roads and smoke trails ran up the hills among the steep canyons. But when he arrived, he realized most bulldozers were attached with more safety equipment than his. He felt somewhat out of his league, he said, but he added there were plenty of men around his age driving tractors.

"It's a job for loggers," Piercy said, "not farmers." One night, he got the opportunity to push a trail with his dozer through what he described as a hotspot.

"It was exciting," he said. "I felt protected because of everyone around me, but I also know there's a level of protection they can't offer you in a fire. A lot of smoke."

Piercy said he was fascinated by the way firefighters used science, weather patterns and other strategies to curb the spread of the blaze.

He also said he was

pleased with the efficiency of supporters, noting the large meals his team received throughout the day, which he estimated to be thousands of calories daily. Each morning they received fresh coffee, hash browns, eggs, sausage, cold cereal, milk and juice. During the day, they ate sandwiches, vegetables, apples, canned tuna, bags of nuts and chips. Every night they received a salad and a warm meal.

"It's logistically amazing," he said.

Restaurants in towns up to two hours away over windy gravel roads fixed meals for the firefighters. Schools received funds for allowing firefighters to camp in their yards. Everybody in town who wanted to work and help out could get a job, he said. They were serious about saving their forests.

"It's an industry," he said. "It energizes those towns."

Although he enjoyed the experience, Piercy said he doubts he'll ever fight a fire like the Elbow Creek Fire again.

"I've realized," he said, "this is probably a young man's work."

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