

MAPS

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congressional seats in a typical year, results that are not even arguably justified by the Democrats’ overall political support in this State or the political geography of the State.”

Fatal flaw?

Oregon Democrats dismissed those claims when they were raised in a special legislative session to draw new districts last month. Now the NDRC is arguing against the Republican arguments in court.

In a filing on behalf of former Democratic Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins and five others, the group suggests the new maps are fair and legal and, in fact, are the product of negotiations between the parties and reflect input from members of the public.

“The fatal flaw in Petitioners’ challenge to the Compromise Map is their erroneous assertion that it ‘is a clear, egregious partisan gerrymander,’” the NDRC filing reads. “The new congressional districts were not drawn for any partisan purpose, and instead are based on the neutral redistricting criteria enumerated in [state law].”

A piece of the Democratic argument hinges on how the new map was passed. After Republicans signaled they would not support Democrats’ first proposed congressional maps, House Speaker Tina Kotek reneged on a deal granting the House GOP equal say on what maps were sent for a vote by the entire chamber.

Kotek’s maneuver allowed Democrats to advance their proposals, but Republicans immediately signaled they might simply walk away from the session, denying Democrats the two-thirds quorum needed to conduct business.

Democrats wound up altering their initial congressional map, which would have given the party a strong chance of a 5-1 advantage over the state’s U.S. House seats. The new map was less weighted in Democrats’ favor, analyses suggest but could tilt in the party’s interest. Republicans eventually returned to the session but objected as Democrats passed the map.

Many within the GOP said the decision to allow the Democratic plan through had little to do with the alterations Democrats made, which they believe are still likely to lead to 5-1 Democratic dominance in Oregon’s U.S. House delegation. Rather, Republicans feared what would happen if they stayed away from session: Maps for the state’s 90 state House and Senate seats would be drawn by Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, a liberal Democrat.

The NDRC filing doesn’t acknowledge that dynamic. It insists that Republicans returned to the session because House Republican Leader Christine Drazen negotiated a congressional map her GOP colleagues could at least stomach.

“The Compromise Map is the congressional redistricting plan that House Majority Leader Drazen had acceded to in negotiations,” the filing says. Later, it concludes: “Ultimately, both the public and legislative records confirm what various news outlets reported: that the congressional map enacted by the Legislative Assembly and signed by Governor Brown was the result of a compromise among legislative leaders.”

PROGRAM

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Ballard, who is also contracted by Art Center East, and McKayla Rollins of the La Grande Parks and Recreation Department.

The program, Caselton Lowe said, is off to a promising start based upon its average of 10 to 15 students per session and the noteworthy quality of work they are doing.

Kyler Petersen is among the students attending the sessions. The eighth grader enjoys the opportunity the program provides to learn to learn new things, but he enjoys something else more.

“The best part of it is making friends and socializing,” the LMS student said.

Petersen and all students in Discover After School walk to Pete’s Pond after class, a distance of about 2 miles. Along the way the students pick up litter. They may later make it into a sculpture-like piece of art, Caselton Lowe said.

To date, five sessions have been completed with the final one for the fall planned for Thursday, Oct. 21. Students will be involved in planting vegetation native to Northeastern Oregon at the final fall session.

Students in the after-school program have also been planting this fall through the creation of seed balls, a group of seeds wrapped in materials such as clay and compost. The seed balls Discover After School students are making contain seeds for plants also native to Northeastern Oregon, such as Great Basin wild rye and blue bunch wheat grass. Students have been taking the seed balls they made home and then



Above, Reid Meinhard, 12, prepares to throw out a “seed bomb,” which contains seeds of native plants wrapped in soil, as part of an after-school program at Pete’s Pond in La Grande on Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2021. Below, Carrie Caselton Lowe assists student Quinton Robinson, 12, with a nature weave.

tossing them into areas where they hope they will take root.

Another session of Discover After School will be conducted in the spring. Pete’s Pond will be one of the sites where six spring sessions will be conducted.

Students will have a chance to see how the pond has come back to life aquatically speaking during some of the sessions. Pete’s Pond is dry now but starting in late fall rain and snow will begin to fill it.

Observing the pond’s transformation as a body of water, Caselton Lowe said, will provide students a chance to develop an enhanced appreciation of nature’s ebbs and flows.

“They will see things from a different perspective,” she said.



EOU

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statistics have been hugely helpful in helping us make key decisions and in keeping the EOU community informed,” said Tim Seydel, Eastern’s vice president of university advancement.

The dashboard previously reported the vaccination rate from all on- and off-campus students residing in Union County, which showed a significantly lower number. The data showed that 64.6% of that student population was vaccinated, while 18.9% of students had filed exemptions.

The exemption rate among students has drawn discontent from some, including La Grande City Councilor Nicole Howard. The professor of history at the university voiced her concerns during a La Grande City Council meeting earlier this month, noting that the vaccination rate from the initial dashboard is lower than expected.

“You would think at an institute of higher education that the number would be higher,” she said. “I think the university could be firmer in their requirement for the vaccine.”

In her opinion, Howard said, the vaccine exemption process at the university could be more strictly enforced, stating concern over the high percentage of exemptions.

“I think you could

fairly say that it is not a vaccine mandate at the university, it’s a vaccine suggestion,” Howard said during the Oct. 6 city council meeting.

Howard also said there’s a need for more testing options for students and staff who filed exemptions. She noted that roughly five to seven of her students are out of class due to quarantine on any given day.

Seydel emphasized that the original graphics from earlier in the month did not paint an accurate picture of the vaccination rate on campus, noting that it included both on-campus and off-campus students.

“It is important to understand, though, that the dashboard posted online includes all EOU students with a residential address in Union County,” he said. “Many of them are fully online, but we wanted to be especially cautious as we enter the school year and include all possible individuals.”

While the update to the vaccination rate raised the total by about 10%, exemption rates still increased as well.

Seydel also noted that student affairs is currently reaching out to these off-campus individuals to see if the students plan to engage on campus in any way.

“All students receiving in-person instruction are either vaccinated or have been tested prior to starting classes,” he said.



Seydel



Howard

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