

Districts: Biggest changes are around the Bend area

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While revisions are likely, the early presentations shed some light on the push-and-pull that will go on before an expected special session of the legislature begins Sept. 20 to try to pass a single plan.

Sixth congressional seat

An immediate difference was where to put the new, sixth congressional seat — Oregon's first new congressional seat in 40 years.

Plans from Democrats and Republicans both used common redistricting methods known as “cracking and packing.”

The proposed Democratic map “cracked” Portland into chunks parceled out into three districts. The newest of the configurations stretches east from Portland to Hood River then south to Bend. The cities are in Hood River and Deschutes counties — the only counties east of the Cascades won by President Joe Biden in his defeat of President Donald Trump in 2020. The change would shift the cities from representation by the congressional delegation's only Republican, freshman U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, of Ontario, to one likely represented by the most liberal congress member, U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, a Portland Democrat.

Republicans would be “packed” into the remaining areas east of the Cascades, making Bentz's district even more prohibitively Republican than now. Blumenauer's district would become less Democratic-leaning, but remain a tough race for Republicans. The other four districts would be remolded to make them less of a nail biter for Democratic incumbents, especially U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, of Springfield, and U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, of Salem.

Republicans proposed “packing” as many Democrats as possible into a district centered on Portland. A GOP win in Oregon's largest city would be even more of a long shot. But the plan keeps Bend and Hood River as blue islands in a Republican red sea east of the Cascades.

With each party having a slam-dunk win, the other four districts were configured to

make a Republican victory either highly likely or very possible. One big change would shift the Astoria area out of the district that takes in a chunk of heavily-Democratic Multnomah and Washington counties. It would move into a district that encompasses more of the coast and only moves inland south of the Portland metro area.

House and Senate

Adding to the already tough task was three different plans for how to divvy up the Senate and House seats — one each from House Democrats, House Republicans and Senate Democrats.

Drawing those lines was already tough because of the requirement that each Senate seat encompass two House seats, with requirements for near equal populations, respecting communities of interest, geographic unity, follow transportation links and elements of the federal Voting Rights Act that could lead to lawsuits contending district lines were drawn to disadvantage racial minorities.

The biggest changes are around the Bend area, which grew by over 20% in the past 10 years, twice the state rate. The total number of House seats would increase in the region, with at least two being likely Democratic wins based on voter registration. Senate District 27, currently held by Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, would move from being a swing district that the Republican has been able to hold despite ever-tighter races, to one Democrats have a strong chance of flipping in the future.

Knopp said it was too early to get overly concerned about the final outcome. He pointed to additional plans submitted to the committees by Oregon residents using a state software program to draw lines. Lawmakers also have several hearings to get input from all areas of the state and political hues.

“There hasn't been agreement on the plans,” he said. “There can't be agreement without the public.”

The stark differences in starting points makes it less likely that a plan can get through the Legislature and avoid a veto by Gov. Kate Brown.

The Oregon Constitution calls for redistricting to be done by the Legislature and approved by the governor.

But this official “Plan A” has only worked twice since 1911. Partisan splits in the Legislature, vetoes by a governor or legal challenges that threw the maps into the courts have more often been the result of the once-a-decade shifting of lines due to population changes.

The constitutional fallback is for legislative districts to be drawn by the secretary of state, while maps for the congressional districts are handled by a special panel of five judges. The plans then go to the Oregon Supreme Court for review.

Democrats hold a political trifecta — the House, Senate and governor's office are all controlled by the party. It seemed that 2021 would be a rare year to have the process in the constitution play out with Republicans limited to complaining from the sidelines.

Upended expectations

The COVID-19 crisis upended expectations. U.S. Census data was delayed by six months and it took an Oregon Supreme Court decision to give the Legislature a shot at coming up with maps — but in a compressed timeline with a hard deadline of Sept. 27 to have a plan to the justices. After that, the secretary of state and the judges panel would draw the lines, which the court would review.

The pandemic also led to a controversial deal giving Republicans a central role in redistricting. House GOP leaders used parliamentary tactics to slow the progress of Democratic legislation during the 2021 session. House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, worried that the constitutionally-mandated deadline to end the 180-day session at the end of June would arrive with key bills left to die.

Kotek struck a deal with House Minority Leader Christine Drazen, R-Canby. In exchange for speeding up voting on bills, Drazen would get a seat on the House Redistricting Committee. The move gave Republicans equal numbers of the panel.

Drazen essentially had a veto over what plan the committee could send to the Legislature. But Drazen also had to decide how

far to push her advantage. Any compromise worked out by lawmakers could still be vetoed by Brown. Legislative redistricting would be done by Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, a Democratic state senator from Portland elected in 2020. If that happened, Republicans would be shut out of any say in districts that would be in place for a decade.

“It will be a tough needle to thread,” Drazen said during a media call after the meeting.

Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Milwaukie, chair of the Senate Redistricting Committee, said speculation on the final shape of any plan was premature. Hearings could raise issues the committee may have missed.

“We want to hear what Oregonians have to say about the maps proposed — what works, what doesn't,” she said.

Independent commissions

The League of Women Voters and other nonpartisan groups hope this will be the last redistricting under the current system. California, Washington and several other states have moved away from the traditional redistricting process used in Oregon to create independent commissions to draw new district lines. In the rest of the nation, the commissions are often a cause of Democrats who are in the minority in most legislatures.

Whichever party benefits, reformers say lawmakers need to be removed from the process.

“There is no amount of technical savvy or sophisticated mapping software that removes the inherent conflict of interest that exists when partisan legislators are given the benefit of drawing their own electoral lines — the fox is guarding the henhouse,” said Norman Turrill, chair of People Not Politicians, the Portland-based coalition advocating for a commission in Oregon.

The group still hopes to get a ballot measure before voters in 2022. But no change will likely occur in districts until the next census in 2030 leads to a new set of political maps in 2032.

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Booster shot: People will not be able to get their first vaccine at booster clinics

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People with weak immune systems — such as those severely infected with HIV or being treated for cancer — can get the booster 28 days after a shot. They often need an extra dose to achieve the normal immunity that others get from one or two doses.

Rebecca Coplin, the interim chief executive of Providence Seaside Hospital, said in an email: “While the CDC only recommends that people with moderately to severely compromised immune systems receive an additional dose, we encourage anyone who is eligible to do so.”

The boosters will be given in the same

order of priority as were the first vaccinations: emergency responders and health care workers, then senior citizens and finally the wider population, the county said.

Bennett said the Public Health Department hopes it can inform people who got their vaccinations earlier this year at a county-run clinic when they are due for a booster.

People will not be able to get their first vaccine at booster clinics, he said.

Coplin added: “For everyone, our best defense in the fight against COVID is to get the COVID vaccines you are eligible for, continue to wear masks indoors, outdoors when physical distancing isn't possible, and to keep your hands clean.”



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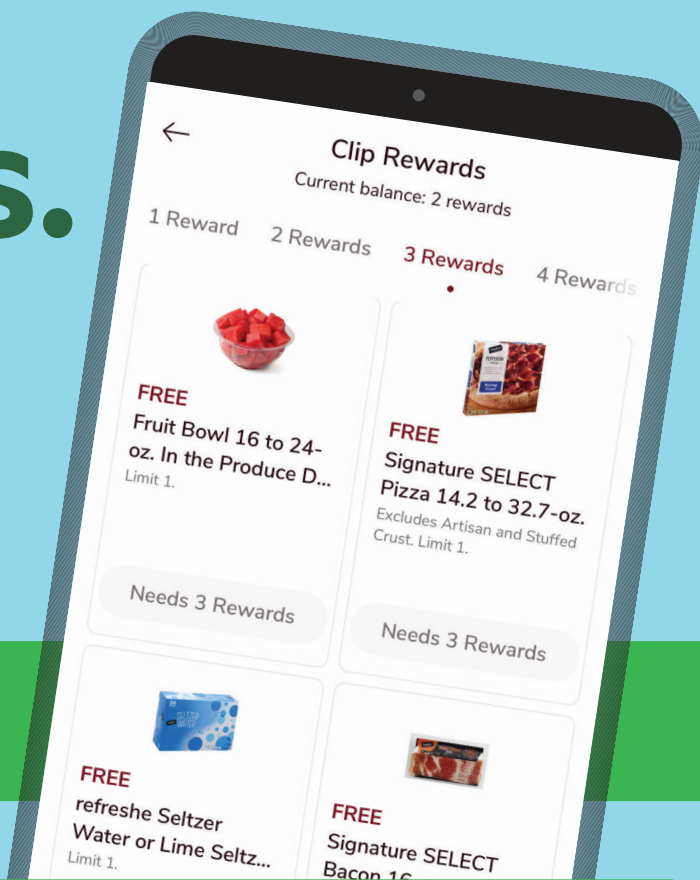
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