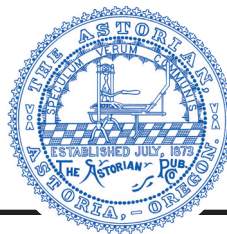


OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

How will redistricting affect you?

I had just parked outside a cafe in downtown Tillamook when state Rep. David Gomberg happened to call. When I casually mentioned my location, Gomberg commented that I was barely a block outside his legislative district.

Say what?

Small-town Tillamook is divided.



DICK HUGHES

Gomberg, D-Otis, and Sen. Dick Anderson, R-Lincoln City, represent the southern part of Tillamook County. Rep. Suzanne Weber, R-Tillamook, and Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, represent the northern portion.

That division came about when the 2011 Legislature rejiggered Oregon's 90 legislative and five congressional districts to balance population changes from the 2010 census.

As is constitutionally required, the Legislature is at it again with new numbers from the 2020 census.

As one example of how this affects Oregonians, here is how the three proposals released this month might alter District 10, which Gomberg represents. The district runs along Lincoln and Tillamook counties but goes inland to parts of Polk and Yamhill counties, including Sheridan and Falls City.

The plan put forth by the Oregon Senate redistricting committee would remove Tillamook, Polk and Yamhill counties and bring in western Benton and Lane counties as far south as Florence. The House Democrats' plan also would drop Polk and Yamhill counties, not go as far south but add Yachats, the rest of the city of Tillamook and coastal Tillamook County. The House Republicans' plan would add Yachats and more of the western Willamette Valley.

Which is best for residents? Would their influence at the Legislature be strengthened or diluted? Which political party would benefit, although theoretically that's not supposed to matter?

Like many of his colleagues, Gomberg recently wrote to constituents about the relevance of redistricting:

"We presently have four districts in the Oregon House that stretch primarily along our coast. But imagine for a moment if Florence were paired with Eugene, Newport and Toledo with Corvallis, Lincoln City with Salem and Tillamook with McMinnville. We'd essentially have more Valley-dominated districts and coastal voices would be diminished.

"To some degree that is the case now with Sheridan, Grand Ronde and Falls



Salem Reporter

State lawmakers are redrawing political boundaries.

STATE LAW DECREES, 'NO DISTRICT SHALL BE DRAWN FOR THE PURPOSE OF FAVORING ANY POLITICAL PARTY, INCUMBENT LEGISLATOR OR OTHER PERSON.' THUS, GERRYMANDERING IS ILLEGAL. IT HAPPENS ANYWAY. STATE AND CONGRESSIONAL LAWMAKERS WANT DISTRICTS CREATED THAT ENHANCE THEIR REELECTION AND THEIR PARTY'S CONTROL.

City, which were added to our House district 10 years ago. I visit them and advocate for them as much as I can. But it is an hour from the coast to Falls City in Polk County and I have to drive out of the district through Dallas to get there. They are frustrated. They don't feel they belong in a 'coastal' district and I understand that."

The rub is that each of Oregon's 60 state House districts must be roughly equal in population. The same holds true for the 30 state Senate districts and the six congressional districts. The biggest battle will be where to put that sixth congressional district that Oregon has gained with the 2020 census.

State law decrees, "No district shall

be drawn for the purpose of favoring any political party, incumbent legislator or other person."

Thus, gerrymandering is illegal. It happens anyway. State and congressional lawmakers want districts created that enhance their reelection and their party's control.

Oregon Congressmen Peter DeFazio and Kurt Schrader made national news for complaining that state House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, surrendered Democrats' advantage when she put an equal number of D's and R's on the House redistricting committee.

State law calls for districts "as nearly as practicable" to be internally contiguous, have equal population, use cur-

rent geographic or political boundaries, be connected by transportation links and not divide "communities of common interest."

Urban areas generally have grown in population, so rural legislative districts must expand in order to have as many residents. Again, taking Gomberg's district as an example, should it grow to the north, east or south? Which of the current and potential towns constitute communities of common interest?

Similar scenarios are playing out across the state. Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, R-Albany, is co-chair of the House redistricting committee. She represents House District 15, which is centered on Linn County.

The House Republicans' proposal most closely would follow existing boundaries. The House Democrats' plan divides the Greater Albany School District. The Senate's plan would add part of Marion County, including some of south Salem, and remove part of Linn County.

As for the potential boundaries for congressional districts, the competing proposals play to partisan desires — although proponents contend they're not gerrymandering.

We're left with a series of questions:

1. How much gerrymandering will ultimately occur, albeit under the guise of common-sense decision-making?

2. Will the Legislature actually meet in special session on Sept. 20 to act on redistricting proposals?

3. Will lawmakers and Gov. Kate Brown agree on a plan? Or, as has happened almost always, will it be left to the courts to set congressional boundaries and Oregon's secretary of state, liberal Shemia Fagan, to draw legislative districts?

4. In the meantime, what effect, if any, will the public testimony at the online hearings and individual Oregonians' boundary proposals have on legislators?

5. Who will win and lose? What communities will be segmented? Which legislators will be edged out of their current districts?

6. As cities and school boards eventually take up local redistricting to equalize population numbers, how will the resulting boundary changes in wards and zones affect local elections?

In short, from city hall to Capitol Hill, how will redistricting determine who represents you? Will you be more likely or less likely to elect someone who represents your views?

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Do our part

Remember the relief we felt at the beginning of the summer, as we began visiting family and friends and enjoying our favorite recreational activities? We could be at that place again in a few months, if we would all get vaccinated as soon as we are eligible (unless there is a medical reason not to be vaccinated) and wear masks in crowded public places until then.

The minor pinprick of vaccination and the temporary inconvenience of wearing a mask are a negligible price to pay for the freedom to gather without infecting each other with a potentially deadly disease.

If we would all do our part, we could look forward to celebrating our favorite winter holidays this year with the added joy of leaving this COVID ordeal behind us.

DEBRA LIVINGSTON
Astoria

Pleased to hear

Because of the recent surge of COVID cases, I have been reluctant to dine inside in a restaurant, so I was pleased to hear that Carruthers is requiring proof of vaccination.

I appreciate that this restaurant is doing its best to create a safe environment for its staff and customers. Great food, too!

KATE DARLING
Astoria

A pledge

The opinion page of The Astorian has appealed with cogent reasoning to a broad number of persons to reconsider their unwillingness to be vaccinated.

With this letter, I'm appealing to one

single person — a longtime good friend. I asked him a couple of months ago whether his reluctance to get vaccinated is based on his religious belief or his political orientation. He told me it was not his belief, as the leaders of his particular religion got their shots early on. The friend said he did not care for "(Dr. Anthony) Fauci and his gang."

When his late mom was lying on her

deathbed, she asked my wife and me to continue to be her son's steady friends as we had been in the past. We pledged our loyalty.

We now ask him to consider whether his continued loyalty to perceived political principles is of a higher nature than to serve his fellow human beings from the imminent dangers to their lives by setting an example. If the human commit-

ment is secondary to personal political convictions, how can our friend reconcile his personal obstinacy with the scriptural demands that he professes to follow?

We pledged our loyalty to his mom and her son. Now we appeal to him to protect his own life and the lives of his fellow human beings.

ERHARD GROSS
Astoria

