

Oregon secretary of state unveils plan for 'people's' redistricting commission

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, Aug. 4, suggesting the process would be the "most inclusive" Oregon has ever seen in a redistricting effort.

Beginning 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



EO Media Group, File

Shemia Fagan speaks during the 2020 campaign for secretary of state. Fagan is planning on establishing a "People's Commission" to provide feedback on redistricting. Her office is opening up a web portal where Oregonians can apply for the new committee, which only would convene if lawmakers fail to pass their own plans to redraw district boundaries.

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 number 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.

'People's Commission'

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 now are 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.

Fagan's "People's Commission" differs significantly from independent commissions in other states. The plan doesn't contain any explicit requirements for a certain number of Republicans or Democrats, though Fagan says she plans to

"make sure that no political party is over represented."

And while commissions elsewhere have the final say in what maps look like, Fagan's group will be advisory only, with no explicit requirement that its input be adopted. Fagan says she's committed to getting the perspective of a wide range of people about what fair and legal districts should look like.

"It's not just what I heard from Oregonians, but I want to hear what all of these commissioners heard as well," Fagan said. "I may not hear the same thing as a commissioner who's a tribal member ... or somebody who's a farmer out in Southern Oregon or Eastern Oregon."

In a normal redistricting year, the process of drawing new political maps would already be well underway, if not finished. The state Constitution gives lawmakers until July 1 to pass new boundaries, and the secretary of state until Aug. 15 if the Legislature fails.

But COVID-19 has thrown the regular timetable out the window. Delays created by the virus have meant that the U.S. Census Bureau doesn't expect to deliver the fine-grained population data required to draw new maps until Aug. 15.

Earlier this year, the Oregon Supreme Court granted lawmakers the ability to skirt normal deadlines, giving the Legislature until Sept. 27 to pass its own set of legislative and congressional maps. If they fail to find agreement, Fagan will have until Oct. 18 to build her own plan for state House and Senate districts. Courts have the final say if lawmakers fail to pass new congressional maps.



NOWA/Contributed Photo, File

An environmental advocacy group filed a lawsuit Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021, alleging Oregon and the federal government are not complying with the Clean Water Act's requirement to produce lists every two years of bodies of water that need cleanup. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality claims the state issued plans to bring down nutrient levels and water temperature in the Columbia River within the last two years.

Lawsuit: Oregon has failed to create cleanup plan for polluted waters

BY KALE WILLIAMS
The Oregonian

SALEM — An environmental advocacy group is suing Oregon and the federal government for failing to make plans to clean up the state's most polluted waterways a requirement of federal law.

The lawsuit, filed Tuesday, Aug. 3, by Northwest Environmental Advocates, alleges the state and federal governments have failed to comply with the Clean Water Act, which mandates states submit to the Environmental Protection Agency a list of water bodies that need cleanup every two years.

That list, ranked by priority, should form the basis for cleanup plans, along with a timeline for implementation within two years. The EPA is supposed to determine whether the plans comply with federal law.

While the state did submit a list of polluted waterways as recently as 2017, which showed more than 3,000

bodies of water requiring cleanup, the state has not issued any new cleanup plans since 2010 after a previous lawsuit brought by the same advocacy group in the mid-1990s, the suit alleges.

"The last time Oregon produced any new water pollution clean-up plans was over a decade ago, and those were the direct result of our having sued EPA in 1996," Nina Bell, NWEA executive director, said in a statement. "It's clear that Oregon only protects water quality in response to lawsuits, so here we are again, heading to federal court."

Jennifer Flynt, a spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, disputed the claims in the lawsuit, saying the state issued plans to bring down nutrient levels and water temperature in the Klamath basin, to mitigate mercury pollution in the Willamette Basin and another for the Columbia River, all within the last two years.

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- Local drive-through model promotes safety.
- Free and confidential; no insurance or immigration status required.

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Pre-Registration Available But Not Required. Results in 2 - 4 Days. <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/osjp/registro/>

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Friday's 3 P.M. - 6 P.M.

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August 13
August 27

UMATILLA ELECTRIC
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July 31
August 14
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