

Legislature begins 46-day race to redistricting on Thursday

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

Eleven state lawmakers on Thursday, Aug. 12, will begin a politically Herculean task with historically small odds of success: Draw 96 new political districts in 46 days that will be used beginning with the 2022 election.

The six Democrats and five Republicans on the House and Senate redistricting committees are set to receive block-by-block U.S. Census data chock full of population and demographic changes since the last map making 10 years ago.

The pandemic and politics led to a six-month delay in delivery of the information on population changes and demographic shifts that is required to draw maps meeting federal and state laws.

It took an Oregon Supreme Court ruling to give the Legislature the first shot at redistricting. But the justices settled on a crushing timeline that would require a special session of the Legislature on Sept. 20 to ratify the maps in time to have them delivered to the court by Sept. 27.

What they come up with has even the most seasoned politicians in Salem scratching their heads.

"Nobody knows what their district's going to look like right now," Senate President Peter Courtney said last week. "Some are going to be dramatically changed, and some aren't."

The committees' to-do list:

- Draw 60 House districts, each with about 70,621 residents.
- Draw 30 Senate districts, each with about 141,242 residents.
- Draw six congressional districts — one more than now exist — each with about 706,209 residents.

If successful, the lawmakers will create the maps, win approval in the House and Senate, and then get Gov. Kate Brown to sign off on the plan.

That's happened once in the past 110 years, in 2011. The rest of the time, the Legislature couldn't agree, the governor would reject the lawmakers' plans, or court challenges would lead to revisions.

Plans for a "road trip" of hearings to present a preliminary plan to the public are now shaky amid a new wave of COVID-19 cases. The committees could return to the earlier format of taking virtual and written testimony.

While the district final lines likely won't be seen until well into the autumn, the initial raw data shows major shifts in the political landscape.

Oregon received a new congressional seat by outpacing the nation in growth. The 2020 population is 4,237,256, reflecting 10.7% growth since 2010, above the 7.4% national average.

But the growth has not been evenly spread across the state. Traditional Republican strongholds in eastern and southwestern Oregon have seen below state average increases.

The biggest bounce has been in the Bend area, with population growth of about 25% since 2010 — the city now has more than 100,000 people. Democrats flipped the state house seat representing most of the city in 2020. Deschutes County gave a majority of its presidential vote to Democrat Joe Biden over then-President Donald Trump.

The other big growth area was a suburban arc around Portland stretching from Wilsonville to Hillsboro, then curving over northern Portland before dropping southeast into Clackamas County. All the current representatives in those areas are Democrats.

House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, fired a warning flare to GOP supporters, noting Democrats control all the levers of power on redistricting, from the Legislature to the governor and secretary of state, and noting a majority of the Oregon Supreme

Court was appointed by Democrats.

Drazan recently suggested that partisanship could be the result of a map favoring Democrats, instead of population shifts.

"We are at high risk of gerrymandering," Drazan said. "They have the power, but we'll be able to question how it is done."

Drazan will wield an unusually large amount of sway due to a deal she struck during the 2021 session with House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland to end parliamentary moves that delayed the pace of votes on Democrats' agenda, Kotek appointed Drazan to the House Redistricting Committee, given party parity with three Democrats and three Republicans.

No similar plan was worked out with the Senate, leaving it with a committee of three Democrats and two Republicans.

How the two panels will be integrated when it comes time to debate and vote on a plan is still in the works.

Democrats thought with large majorities in both chambers and Brown's support, they had a good chance of getting new maps in place for the 2022 election.

If the Legislature stalls on a plan or it is rejected by Brown, the legislative mapmaking goes to Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, while congressional maps would be drawn by a five-judge panel created to do the job.

If Fagan's or the judges' maps are found wanting under legal review, the Oregon Supreme Court would draw the lines itself.

The Oregon Supreme Court has set Feb. 7, 2022, as the latest date for maps to be finalized, including any lawsuits or other legal action.

With redistricting settled by then, potential candidates would have one month until the March 8, 2022, deadline to file for the May 17 primary.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo resigns over sexual harassment allegations

By MARINA VILLENEUVE
Associated Press

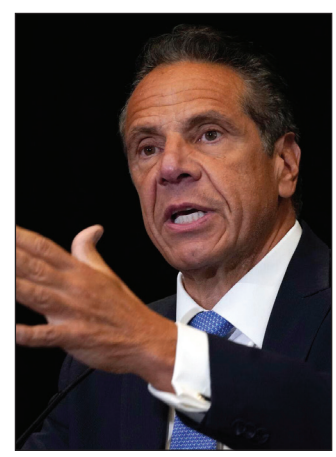
NEW YORK (AP) — Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced his resignation Tuesday, Aug. 10, over a barrage of sexual harassment allegations in a fall from grace a year after he was widely hailed nationally for his detailed daily briefings and leadership during some of the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By turns defiant and chastened, the 63-year-old Democrat emphatically denied intentionally mistreating women and called the pressure for his ouster politically motivated. But he said that fighting back in this "too hot" political climate would subject the state to months of turmoil.

"The best way I can help now is if I step aside and let government get back to governing," Cuomo said in a televised address.

The third-term governor's resignation, which will take effect in two weeks, was announced as momentum built in the Legislature to remove him by impeachment and after nearly the entire Democratic establishment had turned against him, with President Joe Biden joining those calling on him to resign.

The decision came a week after New York's attorney general released the results of an investigation that found Cuomo sexually harassed at least 11 women.



Richard Drew/Associated Press
New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaks during a news conference at New York's Yankee Stadium, Monday, July 26, 2021.

Investigators said he subjected women to unwanted kisses; groped their breasts or buttocks or otherwise touched them inappropriately; made insinuating remarks about their looks and their sex lives; and created a work environment "rife with fear and intimidation."

At the same time, Cuomo was under fire over the discovery that his administration had concealed thousands of COVID-19 deaths among nursing home patients.

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, a 62-year-old Democrat and former member of Congress from the Buffalo area, will become the state's 57th governor and the first woman to hold the post. She said Cuomo's resignation was "the right thing to do and in the best interest of New Yorkers."

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