

# Public weighs in on redistricting — will it matter?

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

A video diaspora of lawmakers, an alphabet soup of proposals, echoing audio, dead air and a buzzer that cut off testimony at three minutes marked the first day of legislative hearings on 2022 redistricting plans Sept. 8.

The House and Senate redistricting committees held back-to-back-to-back hearings to take online testimony on eight proposals for mapping out political districts to be used beginning next year.

The review was the first of 12 public hearings that could determine the electoral future of Oregon for the next decade. Or it could be a frustrating and futile exercise whose results will be in a trash bin two weeks from now.

The hearings are required as part of the state's redistricting laws under which the legislature adjusts the lines for 30 Senate and 60 House districts every 10 years based on population changes in the state.

It also draws congressional districts, which this year include a new, sixth seat, awarded to Oregon because of its overall population growth.

The committees submit a plan to the full legislature, which then passes it to the governor for approval.

"Eight out of the last 10 times that redistricting has been done, that hasn't happened — we're trying to buck the trend," said Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, a member of the Senate Redistricting Committee.

Over the past century, the

process has usually run into stalemate in the legislature, opposition by the governor or court challenges that have led to new maps being drawn by the secretary of state or the courts.

The odds seem particularly long this year because the COVID-19 pandemic delayed 2020 U.S. Census data due in April by over four months.

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Adding to the headwinds to get a plan done: a deal giving House Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, a seat on the House Redistricting Committee.

With political parity on the House committee, it effectively gave the minority-party GOP a veto over any plan getting to the floor of the legislature. But any compromise would have to get pre-approved by Gov. Kate Brown or face a veto that would slam the door on the process.

No vote in the legislature or a Brown veto would end the legislature's role in defining its own fate.

No finalized plan at the Oregon Supreme Court by Sept. 27 would mean the lawmakers are out of the map-making job. All the drafts, deals, debate and public testimony would be off the table and into the trash.

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# Brown: Curtailing school activities could speed drop in COVID-19 cases

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Schools should cancel or curtail some extracurricular activities to help Oregon maintain what appears to be the beginning of a decline from record high numbers of COVID-19 infections, Gov. Kate Brown said Tuesday.

Multiple forecasts over the past week showed a peak in the two-month surge of infections driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

Hospitals remain nearly full, and case reports are still 12 times what they were in early July.

The fragile ebb in the worst of the crisis will be challenged by the flood of schoolchildren returning to class.

"It is with mixed emotions that we are welcoming our kids back to school at this time," said Brown during a Tuesday morning press call.

Brown was joined by health and education officials to announce additional, voluntary efforts to go along with the mandatory vaccination of school employees and mask mandates for students and staff.

The state will issue School Health Advisories on a regular basis. The first one, announced Tuesday, asks schools to cancel or curtail extracurricular activities through at least Oct. 1.

Back-to-school events should be done online, if possible.

Schools should hold as much activity outdoors as possible, including school meals and physical education classes.

"The safety protocols put in place by your school not only make it safer for everyone, but they also help ensure that our kids actually get to stay in school," said Colt Gill, Oregon Education Department director.

While children can get ill from COVID-19, they rarely get severely sick, Gill said. But they can bring the infections home with them and spread it to at-risk people such as the elderly and immunocompromised.

Brown confirmed her order for mandatory vaccinations, saying that staff who are not fully vaccinated cannot have contact with students or other school employees.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state's epidemiologist, said the Oregon Health Authority was looking into an 8.8% increase in the number of new COVID-19 infections in

Marion County.

The uptick comes as the Oregon State Fair in Salem has just concluded. Brown had ordered that crowded outdoor events have mandatory masking rules, but television reports from the fair showed the majority of those inside were not wearing masks.

The rules are also in place for the Pendleton Round-Up, which begins Sept. 11 in Umatilla County. Brown said she hoped fair organizers would follow state rules and noted venues that violated the rule could face state sanctions.

She said she hoped attendees will wear masks and be aware of social distancing and other ways to prevent getting or spreading the virus.

"Let 'er buck," Brown said, using the Round-Up's signature saying.

Brown has attended the Round-Up in prior years and even rode a horse in the parade. She did not go to the state fair and will not be in Pendleton next week out of concern for "public spread" of the virus.

Major public health forecasts indicated for the first time last week that the top of the spike may have been reached.

The growth in infections may have peaked as early as Aug. 25 in Oregon, according to the widely followed COVID-19 monitoring and forecasting of The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington.

The Oregon Health & Science University forecast last week that hospitalizations for COVID-19 were expected to peak at an estimated 1,208 patients on Monday.

"We're in a dire state, but I am seeing some signs that this is going to level out in the next week," said Dr. Peter Graven, the lead forecaster, in a statement accompanying the Sept. 2 report.

The OHSU model showed that, with current mask usage and other safeguards, cases would drop back to pre-surge levels of under 200 hospitalizations by the last two weeks in October. The latest OHA report, from Tuesday, showed 1,140 COVID-19 patients in hospitals, down from 1,172 reported on Friday. If the trendline continues, the number of hospitalizations statewide could be under a dozen by mid-December.

The next OHSU forecast is due Thursday.

The World Health Organization said last week that the delta variant wave worldwide had started to fall, with the United States

somewhat behind Europe and other regions.

The trends won't be known for sure until additional reports over the next week show the drop continuing.

Sidelinger said an increase in voluntary mask wearing and other efforts to slow transmission of COVID-19 could shorten the timeline for getting to a lower level.

On the flip side, if people drop safeguards too early, it could push the recovery into November and closer to impacting the winter holidays.

The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, with the possibility of new variants as long as large numbers of people worldwide remain unvaccinated.

Once it infects someone, the virus can mutate within its host, and release a variant of the original infection.

"This is a crisis that is largely being driven by people who have not yet been vaccinated," said Sidelinger.

As of Tuesday, there have been 221.5 million cases and over 4.58 million deaths worldwide, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

Just over 5.37 million people worldwide are expected to die of COVID-19 by Dec. 1, according to a the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. The United States last week passed 40 million reported cases, and deaths are at 649,271, according to Johns Hopkins. IHMA projects 751,417 deaths by Dec. 1.

As of Tuesday, the Oregon Health Authority reported 3,326 deaths from COVID-19 during the pandemic. IHME projects 4,619 deaths in Oregon by Dec. 1.

Johns Hopkins said its survey of state and local health agencies showed that 44,558 vaccine doses were administered nationwide Monday. Over 176 million people are fully vaccinated, about 51 % of the U.S. population.

The New York Times reported Tuesday that the current spike has peaked in the United States. The average daily new cases of 131,135 is down 12% from two weeks ago. The analysis showed that Oregon had dropped 33% over the same period.

The Oregon Department of Education suggests families should check their school's website or the state's "Ready Schools, Safe Learners" website at <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/readyschools/Pages/default.aspx>.

# Labor Day kicks off the 2022 electioneering season

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Ready or not, Oregon, the 2022 election season is here.

Labor Day weekend of odd-numbered years is the traditional kick-off of serious campaign activity aimed at the ballot voters will mark in 14 months.

If anything, 2021 has a running start. The busy summer needs a primer to catch up on what's happened and what's coming up that will have an impact on the ballot voters will see for the general election on Nov. 8, 2022.

A wide-open governor's race that for the first time in 20 years won't feature an incumbent or former governor on the ballot. Gov. Kate Brown is barred from

seeking a third consecutive term.

A new open congressional seat — Oregon's first in 40 years. With all five current U.S. House members from Oregon seeking re-election, the new district is a chance to join a club that rarely has vacancies.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, is marking 40 years since he first came to Washington as a 31-year-old U.S. House member from Portland. He's running for another term and already has \$6.3 million in the bank for the race.

New political topography in Oregon created by a legally required redrawing of lines for 96 House, Senate and congressional seats might not be finalized until as late as January 2022.

**Kotek's domino effect**

Brown's departure and redistricting have unleashed pent up ambition among politicians whose rise has been blocked by incumbents holding on to the top offices.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, announced recently that she is ready to drop her gavel and run for governor next year. Kotek has brought on veteran campaign advisor Thomas Wheatley, who performed the same role for Brown in her 2018 campaign.

Kotek is the state's longest-serving House Speaker, having been chosen by colleagues in votes every two years since 2013.

Candidates cannot run simultaneously for two offices

on the ballot. That's a trouble spot for Kotek and an advantage for possible primary opponents like Treasurer Tobias Read and Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum.

If either of them run and lose, they go back to their old job.

No votes will have been cast by March 8, 2022, the final day to declare candidacy for office. Kotek will have to make a judgment call on how she is doing in the run up to the primary more than two months later on May 20, 2022.

The deadline for her decision would come the latest day the Legislature can adjourn its 35-day session that begins in February.

Kotek's departure from the House would set off a scramble

for her job.

Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Clackamas, mounted an unsuccessful coup in the caucus at the beginning of the last session in a bid to replace Kotek.

Bynum would likely try again — unless she decides to run for congress.

House Majority Leader Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, and Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, a top Kotek lieutenant, could look to step up.

Bureau of Labor & Industries Commissioner Val Hoyle has denied rumors she is mulling a run for governor, saying she will run for re-election in 2022.

**Rebound or relapse for Republicans**

Republicans are fighting to remain viable as a statewide political force.

A Republican hasn't been elected governor since Vic Atiyeh won a second term in 1982.

Wyden and Oregon's other senator, Jeff Merkley, are both Democrats, as are four of the five U.S. House members.

The GOP holds no state executive offices. Democrats have a 37-23 supermajority in the House and an 18-12 supermajority in the Senate.

Republican candidates making bids for office often face better-known, better-financed incumbent Democrats.

The small number of top Republican officeholders and former lawmakers hasn't shown a desire to make a run for governor.



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