

Florida House proposes redistricting changes, Senate schedules vote - Breaking News

HERALD/TIMES TALLAHASSEE BUREAU

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The House Reapportionment subcommittees are scheduled to narrow the field to three proposals for both the House and Congressional maps on Monday, said Rep. Will Weatherford, chairman of the full committee. He said Wednesday the House will complete its by the session's midpoint.

The Senate, meanwhile, is moving at a more accelerated pace. It plans to vote on its proposals for state Senate and congressional maps on Jan. 11, a day after the session begins. The chamber will then bring the bills to second reading on Jan. 17, with a final floor vote scheduled no later than Jan. 20, said Sen. Don Gaetz, Senate Reapportionment Committee chairman.

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House tweaks its redistricting maps; Senate schedules its vote

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Legislators open 2012 session on Tuesday

By KEVIN WADLOW

Any issues specific to the Florida Keys likely must take a back seat in the Florida Legislature session that opens Tuesday in Tallahassee.

"Redistricting, gambling and the state budget are the big three items," state Rep. Ron Saunders (D-Key West) said after arriving in Tallahassee on Friday. "All of those affect Monroe County, of course, but not any more than everybody else."

The session begins two months early in 2012 so lawmakers can finish work on the statewide election redistricting plan required after every national census. The session is scheduled to finish March 9, about the time the 60-day session normally commences.

"The big question in redistricting is whether Monroe County will keep Ileana Ros-Lehtinen [as its congresswoman] or whether we'll be moved into somebody else's district," Saunders said.

The Florida Senate's proposed redistricting would keep the Keys with Ros-Lehtinen, but the Florida House plan could move the county into U.S. Rep. David Rivera's congressional district. Ros-Lehtinen has said she'd prefer the Keys remain in her district.

"I really have not gotten a good indication what's going to happen," Saunders said. "Committees are meeting Monday and Tuesday so we may know more then. We'll have to wait and see."

Since a redistricting plan must be approved in time to plan for 2012 elections, that is expected to be the main priority in the session's opening weeks.

Monroe County's two state legislative seats -- Saunders' House District 120 and Senate District 39 now held by Democrat Larcenia Bullard of Miami -- are not expected to change significantly, Saunders said.

Gov. Rick Scott will make the annual state of the state address Tuesday morning. Saunders, as House Democratic Party leader, will deliver the party's response. "I don't know what I'll be saying because I don't have anything to respond to yet," he said.

In December, Scott issued his proposed \$66.4 billion budget. It calls for \$1 billion more in education spending statewide, and \$40 million for Everglades restoration.

Saunders praised the governor's suggestion to restore spending cuts made last year, but added, "I am concerned about some of the governor's recommendations, including what could be potentially harmful cuts to social services and health-care programs for Floridians."

The Legislature is not required to follow the governor's budget recommendations.

"We will be watching the state budget," Monroe County Administrator Roman Gastesi said Friday. "About 15 percent of the county's budget -- a good chunk -- is supported by the state budget."

"We want to make sure we don't have any unfunded mandates, which is always a concern," Gastesi said. "You've got watch if any tax revenues are shifted or lowered without our knowledge or without compensation."

A county bid to secure \$200 million in sewer funding has long been on the table. "Right now it doesn't look good," Gastesi said, "but we're working on it."

Monroe County's court system has been hard-pressed financially since the Legislature changed most of statewide court funding to revenues from assorted court fees. Since foreclosures and other legal filings have dropped, that left court managers counting every penny.

"There is legislation coming up this session that proposes to change the mechanics of funding," Monroe County Clerk of the Court Danny Kolhage said. "It's good legislation that should be passed and we support it. Whether it will be is another matter."

Kolhage said court officials do not expect any immediate financial relief. "We're pretty much fighting just to

keep what we have."

Gambling also is expected to take up much of the session, with three massive "destination casinos" considered for South Florida.

Race tracks and other pari-mutuels have mounted opposition since the casinos could change the shape of Florida's established gaming industry. "My personal prediction is that [the destination casinos plan] isn't going to pass," Saunders said.

Senate district map for Pasco draws critics

By [Lee Logan](#), Times Staff Writer
Tampa Bay Times
In Print: Sunday, January 8, 2012

Ever since lawmakers in November released proposed new boundaries for the Florida Senate, the way Pasco was divided has produced quiet grumbling.

But those concerns reached a new volume this week when House Speaker-designate Will Weatherford called the map a "head scratcher."

"It's still early in the process," he said Friday. "The House and the Senate still have a long way to go before these things become law. We've got time to iron out all the differences."

Under the proposed Senate map, a half moon-shaped slice lumps Zephyrhills with portions of Trinity and north Tampa. A neighboring district includes west Pasco and Dade City, along with much of Hernando and Sumter counties.

Several Pasco critics point to a July public hearing in Wesley Chapel. Many residents there asked to either keep Pasco whole in the Senate map or to split the county into east and west halves, using the Suncoast Parkway or U.S. 41 as a dividing line.

Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, is in charge of the redistricting effort in the House. His counterpart, incoming Senate President Don Gaetz of Niceville, is shepherding the Senate map.

A Senate committee plans to vote on the proposal Wednesday, and House subcommittees are set to narrow the field to three choices for both the House and Congressional maps on Monday.

Some observers say the map benefits incumbent state Sen. Jim Norman, R-Tampa. His new district would pick up more Pasco voters and would shed some north Tampa areas that might better remember a recent scandal stemming from a \$500,000 loan Norman's wife received from a political supporter. She used the money to buy a waterfront home in Arkansas. The transaction occurred during his 18 years on the Hillsborough County Commission.

Federal prosecutors announced last month that they found no evidence Norman broke the law, and he said recently he is "clean as a whistle."

The map would also put two well-funded hopefuls in another district: term-limited Rep. John Legg, R-Port Richey, and Trilby egg farmer Wilton Simpson. A first-time candidate, Simpson is currently a constituent of Norman's. The new district would shed much of east Pasco.

The Senate map wasn't drawn with those political considerations in mind, argued Sen. Jack Latvala, a Clearwater Republican who sits on the Senate redistricting committee.

"What they did makes sense," he said. "I think that the folks that live in Land O'Lakes and in Wesley Chapel are more attuned to Tampa than they are to Sumter County."

Latvala, who previously served in the Senate a decade ago during the last round of redistricting, said House leaders traditionally draw a map for their own chamber while Senate leaders draw the Senate map.

"Some of the (House) maps I've seen in Pinellas County frankly don't make sense to me," he said. "I'm not going to go micromanage the House map. I certainly hope they won't micromanage our map."

Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, is vacating the District 11 seat that would include Legg and Simpson. He has removed himself from the redistricting process, but said he shares Weatherford's concerns.

"My question would be, what do the people in Holiday ... have in common with the people all the way up in Sumter County?" he said.

But Latvala said he hasn't heard any senators who disagree with Pasco's treatment and that the lines don't always come down neatly. "Unfortunately you've got to split some counties," he said.

Lee Logan can be reached at llogan@tampabay.com or (727) 869-6236.



Redistricting 2012

Your guide to the once-a-decade challenge of redistricting is at tampabay.com/redistricting.

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Legislative redistricting process could shift Treasure Coast voter bases » TCPalm.com

Key redistricting dates

Jan. 10-March 9: Regular Session

February-June: Legal reviews

June 4-8: Qualifying for state and federal offices

Aug. 14: Primary election

Nov. 6: General election

Source: Florida Senate

View the maps

To view the House's five proposals for new state House maps and seven proposals for congressional maps: <http://flhouse.gov/Sections/Redistricting/Redistricting2012.aspx>

To view the Senate's one proposal for the new state Senate map and one proposal for congressional map: <http://flsenate.gov/Session/Redistricting/>

The Legislature's district-drawing process this session will tweak who Treasure Coast voters can choose to represent them during state and federal legislative races until 2021.

Already, the once-a-decade redistricting process has produced Florida House, Senate and congressional maps that would shift voter bases across the region. As early as the elections this fall, the final maps crafted from now until March by the Legislature and ultimately approved by the Florida Supreme Court will have big political implications locally and statewide.

That could mean entirely new districts on the Treasure Coast — including one in St. Lucie County that doesn't exist right now — and opportunities for new political leaders to emerge in races for those seats.

Some local lawmakers might no longer even be in a district covering the Treasure Coast by election time.

Districts housing U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Miramar, state [Rep. Steve Perman](#), D-Boca Raton, and state [Rep. Tom Goodson](#), R-Cocoa, wouldn't touch the Treasure Coast in the proposals.

Hastings now covers Fort Pierce, western St. Lucie County and part of Indiantown in his district. Perman currently picks up parts of western St. Lucie County, Fort Pierce and Indiantown. Goodson represents western Indian River County.

The state House and Senate are redrawing lines based on 10-year population and demographic shifts in the 2010 U.S. Census. Both chambers need to pass mirroring bills for Congress and the two state chambers by the session's March 9 end. Only the congressional map needs to pass [Gov. Rick Scott](#)'s veto pen.

But the maps also must pass two big hurdles: potential review of minority representation districts under the federal Voting Rights Act; and likely legal challenges under Florida's newly adopted amendments against gerrymandering to favor political parties or incumbents.

Legal proceedings could bounce the maps back to the Legislature for redrawing or, in the most extreme case, the courts draw the final maps.

That all needs to occur in time for candidates to understand where they fall in the new districts before qualifying, which ends June 8.

Adding another twist to election season, congressional candidates do not need to live in the district in which they run under the U.S. Constitution. Candidates need to be seven-year U.S. citizens and Florida residents

when elected. But they could technically run in a district where they don't live. For example, U.S. Rep. Allen West, R-Plantation, currently lives just outside of his District 22 seat.

Candidates for state seats must live in the district they wish to represent.

DISTRICT BREAKDOWNS

Judging from early map drafts, many Treasure Coast incumbent legislators are poised to fall in starkly different districts once qualifying rolls around.

Most map proposals show consistent changes to Treasure Coast state and federal districts. Only one House and one federal proposal call for big variations from the other sets of maps. House redistricting leaders have released seven congressional maps and five options for state House maps. The Senate proposed its own set of congressional lines and one state Senate map.

Here's a closer look at the proposals and what they could mean for the Treasure Coast and its lawmakers. The percentages shown are the range of possibilities in the multiple proposals. The breakout includes:

A percentage breakdown of Democrats, Republicans and independents (includes all other voters not registered Democrats or Republicans) in the new district proposals versus the current districts.

A percentage breakdown of whom proposed districts voted for in the last elections for governor and president.

Many districts also would change numbers. New congressional district numbering differs between House and Senate proposals, so both numbers are included.

Congress (covers eight proposed maps)

District 8 (House proposals); District 15 (Senate proposal)

Incumbent: Bill Posey, R-Rockledge

Bottom line: Indian River County's sole congressional district would stay intact, except in one proposed map splitting the county. The district also would add the rest of Brevard in most drafts, giving Brevard an increased share of the voter base. It would likely lose its Osceola and Polk portions.

Current Posey District 15: Indian River and part of Brevard, Osceola and Polk counties

Current voter registration: 40.3 percent Republican, 37.3 Democrat, 22.4 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 42 to 44 percent Republican, 34 to 35 Democrat, 21.1 independent

2008 presidential results in proposals: Barack Obama 43.8 to 45 percent, John McCain 53 to 54.9

2010 governor results in proposals: Rick Scott 54.3 to 55.1 percent, Alex Sink 40.4 to 41.9

District 18 (House proposals); District 16 (Senate proposal)

Incumbent: Tom Rooney, R-Tequesta

Bottom line: Rooney's sprawling eight-county district would lose a lot of its central Florida agricultural base, while still covering all of Martin, adding the rest of St. Lucie and maintaining northern Palm Beach County and a slice of Okeechobee.

Current Rooney District 16: Martin, parts of St. Lucie and Palm Beach, Charlotte, Glades, Hendry, Highlands counties

Voter registration: 40.4 percent Republican, 37.3 Democrat, 22.2 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 37.5 to 37.7 percent Republican, 37.7 to 37.9 percent Democrat, 24.6 independent

2008 presidential results in proposals: Obama 51.1 to 51.3 percent, McCain 47.8 to 48

2010 governor results in proposals: Scott 49 to 49.2 percent, Sink 47.4 to 47.6

State Senate (covers one proposed map)

District 25

Incumbent: [Joe Negron](#), R-Stuart

Bottom line: Most of the Treasure Coast and northern Palm Beach County east of Interstate 95 would fall into a district where Negron would run, including an Indian River County chunk previously not in his district — all of east of I-95 south of Sebastian. A St. Lucie portion between Florida's Turnpike and I-95, which includes Tradition, would not be in the district, and southern Martin west of I-95 would be included.

Current Negron District 28: Indian River County's shoreline and parts of Martin, St. Lucie, Okeechobee and Palm Beach counties

Current voter registration: 41.2 percent Republican, 35 Democrat, 23.8 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 42.1 percent Republican, 35 Democrat, 22.9 independent

2008 presidential results in proposal: Obama 47.6 percent, McCain 51.3

2010 governor results in proposal: Scott 52.7 percent, Sink 43.5

District 26

Incumbent: J.D. Alexander, R-Lake Wales; vacating seat because of term limits

Bottom line: The rural district would hit most of central Florida while covering eight counties, including St. Lucie and Martin counties' west-of-I-95 voters, and a portion of St. Lucie between Florida's Turnpike and I-95 that includes Tradition.

Current Alexander District 17: Part of western St. Lucie County; Hardee and Highlands counties; parts of DeSoto, Polk, Glades and Okeechobee counties

Current voter registration: 39.6 percent Republican, 43.2 Democrat, 17.2 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 37.4 percent Republican, 42.8 Democrat, 19.7 independent

2008 presidential results in proposal: Obama 45 percent, McCain 53.7

2010 governor results in proposal: Scott 53.1 percent, Sink 42

District 18

Incumbent: Mike Haridopolos, R-Merritt Island; vacating seat because of term limits

Bottom line: The soon-to-be-vacated Haridopolos seat would lose a chunk of Indian River east of I-95 south of Sebastian to Negron's proposed district, but gain even more of Brevard.

Current Haridopolos District 26: Part of Osceola and Brevard counties, most of Indian River County and a small portion of St. Lucie County

Current voter registration: 41.1 percent Republican, 37.3 Democrat, 21.6 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 42.7 percent Republican, 35.7 Democrat, 21.5 independent

2008 presidential results in proposal: Obama 44.9 percent, McCain 53.8

2010 governor results in proposal: Scott 53.9 percent, Sink 41.5

State House (five proposed maps)

District 54

Incumbent: Debbie Mayfield, R-Vero Beach

Bottom line: The district would gain the rest of Indian River County and keep northwestern St. Lucie County in all but one proposal, but would lose St. Lucie's Hutchinson Island voters and most of western St. Lucie.

Current Mayfield District 80: Parts of Indian River, St. Lucie and Brevard counties

Current voter registration: 46 percent Republican, 32.5 Democrat, 21.5 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 46.2 to 46.7 percent Republican, 31.1 to 32 Democrat, 21.1 to 22.8 independent

2008 presidential results in proposals: Obama 42.4 to 43.3 percent, McCain 55.3 to 56.2

2010 governor: Scott 57.3 to 57.9, Sink 38 to 38.7 District 84

St. Lucie County district (new district)

Bottom line: No current legislator lives in St. Lucie County, so that could mean a new House representative covering the county's oceanfront, southern Fort Pierce east of Florida's Turnpike and most of Port St. Lucie north of the Crosstown Parkway and areas out past I-95 in spots.

Voter registration in proposed district: 31.7 to 32.1 percent Republican, 44.6 to 45.4 Democrat, 22.9 to 23.1 independent

2008 presidential results in proposals: Obama 55.4 to 56.3, McCain 42.6 to 43.3

2010 governor results in proposals: Scott 44.8 to 45.5 percent, Sink 50 to 50.9

District 55 Rural district (current district does not touch Treasure Coast)

Incumbent: Rep. Denise Grimsley, R-Sebring; vacating seat to run for Senate

Bottom line: Most of St. Lucie's west-of-I-95 crowd — minus much of the Port St. Lucie I-95 interchange areas — would be bunched together with rural Highland, Okeechobee and Glades counties.

Voter registration in proposed district: 40.3 to 40.5 percent Republican, 42.2 to 42.6 Democrat, 17 to 17.3 independent

2008 presidential results in proposals: Obama 39.9 to 40.2 percent, McCain 58.5 to 58.7

2010 governor results in proposals: Scott 56.8 to 56.9 percent, Sink 37.9 to 38

District 83

Incumbent: Gayle Harrell, R-Stuart

Bottom line: In all but one map, an incumbent Harrell seat would only maintain a slice of Port St. Lucie south of Crosstown Parkway that extends west of I-95. It would, however, grab downtown Stuart and parts of Palm City.

Current Harrell District 81: Parts of western and northeastern Martin County, including the northern shoreline; parts of St. Lucie County

Current voter registration: 38.6 percent Republican, 38 Democrat, 23.4 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 38.8 to 39.2 percent Republican, 36.7 to 37.1 Democrat, 24 independent

2008 presidential results in proposals: Obama 50.6 to 51 percent, McCain 48 to 48.4

2010 governor results in proposals: Scott 49.2 to 49.6 percent, Sink 46.5 to 46.8

District 82

Incumbent: William Snyder, R-Stuart; vacating seat for Martin County Sheriff campaign

Bottom line: Snyder's soon-to-be-open seat would grab all of Indiantown, the Jupiter/Tequesta area and most of Martin, but it'd lose downtown Stuart to a district to the north.

Current Snyder District 82: Parts of Martin, St. Lucie and Palm Beach counties

Current voter registration: 43.9 percent Republican, 32.7 Democrat, 24.8 independent

Voter registration in proposed district: 45.7 to 46.1 percent Republican, 29.4 to 29.5 Democrat, 24.4 to 24.8 independent

2008 presidential results in proposals: Obama 44.1 percent, McCain 55

2010 governor results in proposals: Scott 55.7 to 55.8 percent, Sink 41 to 41.1

Source: State Division of Elections figures from 2010 and 2008 general elections; Orlando Sentinel analysis.

Push to delay state primary worries Tampa

By WILLIAM MARCH | The Tampa Tribune

Published: January 07, 2012 Updated: January 07, 2012 - 8:00 AM

TAMPA --

Tampa officials are worried about a move in the Legislature to push the state primary election back a week, putting it on the Tuesday before the Republican National Convention in Tampa.

The reasons for the move aren't clear but may relate to this year's redistricting for congressional and legislative elections. There is concern that passing the redistricting plans and having them approved by federal and state judicial authorities could take too long to allow for candidate qualifying and campaigns.

But Hillsborough County Elections Supervisor Earl Lennard and Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn say preparations for the convention, which might include blocking streets downtown, could cause havoc with an election on the proposed Aug. 21 date.

The convention will begin Aug. 27. In a memo about the change, Lennard said streets could be closed and access to downtown areas limited as early as Aug. 20.

At least a half-dozen polling places downtown could be affected, election officials said, including the headquarters in the Frederick B. Karl County Center downtown.

Lennard said he objects in part because contracts with polling places, poll-worker schedules and voter education materials have been done based on the Aug. 14 date.

But he said his "gravest concern" is that convention preparation "will severely impede voters, poll workers, poll watchers and candidates," and hinder setting up and servicing polling sites.

Buckhorn has urged that downtown workers try to make arrangements to work from home during the convention because of likely traffic problems.

He said no one knows which downtown streets will be affected or when but that Lennard has "a very legitimate concern. ... There will be a heavy security presence downtown. Harbour Island will be affected, and Channelside. The last thing we need is anything that will complicate what is already a huge undertaking."

Polling places closest to the convention sites that could be affected, election officials and Buckhorn said, include The Florida Aquarium, First Baptist Church on Kennedy Boulevard and two precincts on Harbour Island, which Buckhorn said are among those with the city's highest turnouts.

Some Democrats said the issue is an example of problems created by the Republican-led Legislature's delay in finishing redistricting — drawing new maps for legislative and congressional elections.

They have accused the Legislature of stalling the process to make it harder for challengers to take on incumbent Republicans, who hold legislative majorities of more than 2-to-1.

"The Legislature spent an entire year doing hearings, and waited until December to actually produce a map," said former state Sen. Dan Gelber, a lawyer involved in legal challenges to Florida election laws. "It only helps incumbents to wait."

But state Rep. Dana Young defended the process, saying any delay was only because Florida was among the last of the states to get U.S. census data required to do the redistricting.

"We've gone about as quickly as we possibly could," Young said.

Moving the primary date would also cause the dates for qualifying for offices, currently June 4-8, to be a week later.

"That's probably the No. 1 reason, to provide more time for the voters to get their new voter ID cards and candidates to look at their new districts," said Alachua County Elections Supervisor Ion Sancho, who favors

the bill.

If the Senate Ethics and Elections subcommittee approves it in a meeting Wednesday, it will become a committee bill, with somewhat better prospects of passage than a bill filed by an individual senator.

Sen. Miguel Diaz de la Portilla, R-Miami, chairman of the Senate committee, couldn't be reached for comment Friday.

Committee member Sen. Arthenia Joyner, D-Tampa, said she had favored the bill before learning of Lennard's objection.

She said the current Aug. 14 date occurs before many college students go back to school and that many are registered to vote where they go to school; in addition, public schools are still closed, meaning many families could still be on vacation.

"I think we're going to have to find a way to work it out locally, so it doesn't present a problem," she said.

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Rod Smith defends the redistricting maps his staff drew
Uncategorized — posted by aaron deslatte on January, 11 2012 2:39 PM
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TALLAHASSEE — Florida Democratic Party Chairman **Rod Smith** just put a statement defending proposed Senate and congressional redistricting maps that Senate Minority Leader **Nan Rich**, D-Weston, had filed — then tabled without a vote. The maps were drawn by his own shop with the help of “national demographers,” but have already riled some black Democrats and Republicans alike because they would more evenly spread Democratic voters among more districts — and create fewer likely to elect minorities in the process, critics like Senate Majority Leader **Andy Gardiner**, R-Orlando, alleged Wednesday.
Smith takes umbrage with that sentiment.
“We believe Senator Nan Rich’s maps comply with the governing principals of the Voting Rights Act while at the same time reconciling the voter-approved principles and guidelines of Amendments 5 & 6. Furthermore, Sen. Rich’s maps stand in stark contrast to those submitted by Republican Senator Don Gaetz. Sen. Gaetz’s proposed maps represent incumbent protection and partisan advantage at its worst — the very things Florida voters overwhelmingly rejected,” Smith said in a statement.
“The suggestion that Sen. Rich’s maps are retrogressive in any way is without merit. We believe our maps are clearly in compliance with the Fair Districts standards, more so than any other maps submitted to date. Our guiding principles prohibit us from racial gerrymandering, incumbent protection or partisan advantage.”

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Comments

Gaetz is an ass, and has had it on full display lately spouting obnoxious messages over twitter and across the State. Divisive rude and obnoxious politicians such as him do not deserve a seat at any table in discussing what is best for Florida.

Reply Posted by: FLDemNinja | Wednesday, January 11, 2012 at 2:59 PM

The problem with the “Fair Districts” issue is that it never reset the bar... absent this, the baseline is the existing districts... Do the proposed districts use natural borders? Do they preserve minority access districts in accordance with the federal law?

Dems should have come out with their maps first and then they could have claimed the legislatively proposed were in conflict...

Reply Posted by: LOL | Wednesday, January 11, 2012 at 3:12 PM

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Senate committee signs off on redistricting maps | Florida politics blog: The Buzz



The Buzz

From the staff of the Tampa Bay Times

JANUARY 11, 2012

Senate committee signs off on redistricting maps

After a bitter debate over a last-minute map produced and withdrawn by Democrats, the Senate Reapportionment Committee on Wednesday voted out its proposals to redraw the political lines for the Senate and Congress for the next 10 years.

If adopted by the full Senate next week, as expected, the bills will move to the House where legislative leaders hope they will get final resolution by the end of the month. The legislative maps will then be sent to the Florida Supreme Court, as required, and the congressional map will go to the governor for his signature.

The court has 30 days to approve or reject the proposal and lawmakers want a chance to rewrite it, if necessary, before session ends March 9.

"Should there be any areas in which the Supreme Court to have another look at the maps, my hope is we could do that while we're still in session," said Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, chairman of the committee. "I don't want to come back for a redistricting session. I hope we don't have to."

Prior to the meeting Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich, D-Weston, submitted two alternative maps that would have reduced the number of Democrats packed into the Senate and Congressional seats proposals, created more competitive Republican seats, and resulted in two more Democrat-leaning districts than the Republican proposals.

But Rich abruptly withdrew the amendments, saying instead that she will resubmit them as an amendment when the full chamber votes on the measure Jan. 17.

"I believe we can do a better in reconciling the Voting Rights Act and the constitutional amendments," she said, a reference to the newly-adopted Fair Districts amendments that prohibit legislators from protecting incumbents or political parties when drawing maps.

The suggestion that senators would be asked to vote on a fresh map they will have only had the weekend to see, drew sharp rebukes from Republicans on the committee.

"I am totally disconcerted and unhappy with the way this has been handled to get a massive change of a map that I have no idea what it is," said Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormond Beach.

But it was clear that Rich didn't even have the support of her own members for her plan.

"This would have clearly diminished the ability for African Americans to be elected to office," said Sen. Larcenia Bullard, D-Miami, whose son hopes to replace her when she leaves because of term limits. She said she would vote against any map proposed by Democrats that weakens minority districts.

Rich said that she relied on help from staff at the Democratic Party of Florida to draw her maps, since Senate Democrats do not have access to the staff that the Republican leadership has. She said they made not attempt to protect incumbent and that Bullard's district "has never been a minority access district. It's been pretty evenly divided" and has become much more Hispanic in population so must change.

Unlike the Republican map, Rich said, the Senate map create a new minority access seat in Palm Beach County which could elect another black to the Senate.

The committee voted 22-4 in favor of the Senate map, with four of the 10 Democrats on the committee opposed: Rich, Maria Sachs of Delray Beach, Oscar Braynon of Miami and Arthenia Joyner of Tampa.

According to a Herald/Times analysis, the map of the 40-member Senate creates 24 Republican-leaning districts, sacrificing Republican strength in areas now held by 11 of the senators leaving because of term limits. The proposal includes 14 Democrat-leaning districts and two competitive districts that could be considered a toss-up. The map creates a new Hispanic access seat in Central Florida and eight of the districts have 50 percent or more minority voters.

The map could result in some of the chamber's 29 Republicans, facing more competitive races in the 40-member House in the 2012 elections but is sure to preserve the Republican majority in both the Senate and the Congressional delegation.

The Senate adopted amendments to its original map that, staff said, keeps more communities together. Although the Senate did not include the hometowns of any members, both the Senate and Congressional maps preserve the districts of nearly every incumbent hoping to return to office next year.

The Congressional map approved by the committee creates 15 Republican-leaning districts, 10 Democrat-leaning districts and two competitive districts. Five of the districts have fifty percent or more registered Democratic voters, including the minority majority seats now held by U.S. Reps. Corrine Brown, Alcee Hastings and Frederica Wilson. None of the districts have 30 percent or more registered Independent voters. In six of the proposed districts, 50 percent or more of registered voters are black or Hispanic, including districts now held by U.S. Reps. David Rivera and Mario Diaz Balart.

Posted by Mary Ellen Klas at 5:54:31 pm on January 11, 2012 in

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Florida Politics

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Rich withdraws Democratic Party-drawn redistricting maps

By Aaron Deslatte January 11, 2012 01:51 PM

TALLAHASSEE -- Groups that backed the Fair Districts anti-gerrymandering reforms passed last year -- the League of Women Voters, Democracia, Common Cause and the Florida Democratic Party -- have crafted new congressional and state Senate maps.

And surprise: they would create more competitive playing fields for the minority party than the versions the Senate Reapportionment Committee is taking up and likely to pass this afternoon.

Double surprise: they appear to be headed nowhere.

Senate Minority Leader **Nan Rich**, D-Sunrise, filed congressional and Senate maps this week as an alternative to the version the GOP-controlled chamber is advancing.

And a Sentinel analysis of the maps indicates they would create seats where Democrats had more voters in 14 districts compared to 13 with a Republican voter advantage. Looking at performance, the Rich map would create 15 districts that would have gone to Republican **Rick Scott** in the 2010 governor's race and 13 for Democrat **Alex Sink**. In 2008, **John McCain** would have won 13 districts and Democrat Barack Obama would have won 14.

With the current 25 congressional districts (Florida gains two seats in reapportionment), 15 have a GOP voter-edge and 10 have a Democratic one. The 2010 gubernatorial and 2008 presidential outcomes are also more lopsided in favor of Republicans -- because Democratic voters are more more urban and concentrated in urban districts.

Rich's Senate map has a similar contrast with the GOP-designed maps slated for passage today. Scott would have won 23 of the 40 Senate seats and Sink would have won 17. Under the current districts, Scott won the vote in 25 of the districts. In the version of the maps slated for passage today, Scott would have won 26 of them.

Democrats call it "packing," Republicans call it an unavoidable geographic reality based on where people live (usually close to other people who think and look like they do).

What's interesting about Rich's maps are that they were created by the Florida Democratic Party and "national demographers," according to the Senate Minority Office.

The Fair Districts reforms explicitly forbid maps from being drawn with the intent of favoring or disfavoring a political party of incumbent -- so, a lawyer could make a decent circumstantial case that Rich's maps don't comply with the Fair Districts reforms.

Rich has made the opposite argument: that the versions set to pass out of the Senate committee today don't follow the design of the reforms, because they do intentionally gerrymander districts that protect minority seats. Republican lawmakers say they have to do so, because past court precedent, federal law, and the Fair Districts amendments themselves don't allow them to diminish minority numbers in the Legislature and congressional delegation.

"If the maps that come out of here don't abide by Amendments 5 and 6, they will go to court," she said Tuesday.

"Our map is not drawn for any specific incumbent," Rich said.

Specifically, on U.S. Rep. **Corrine Brown's** district -- which stretches from Jacksonville to Orlando and would be dramatically re-shaped by Rich's amendment -- she said, "It's not constitutional under the standards that we have in our constitution. Ten years ago, we didn't have those standards. Today we do have them."

But on Wednesday, Rich said it appeared the maps don't comply with the law as well as she wanted, and she withdrew them.

At least one fellow Democrat on the committee, Sen. **Larcenia Bullard**, D-Miami, criticized the maps her leader had filed because she said they would diminish minority voting strength in a half-dozen seats.



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"We cannot do that," Bullard said.
Rich said she planned to make changes, then re-submit her maps as amendments on the Senate floor next Tuesday July 2011 when the chamber debates them. That drew some criticism from Sens. **John Thrasher**, R-St. Augustine, and **Evelyn June 2011** **Lynn**, R-Ormond Beach, who said they were concerned the changes were coming up late in the process. May 2011
'This is the process we all agreed to," Rich said. April 2011
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still open. December 2011

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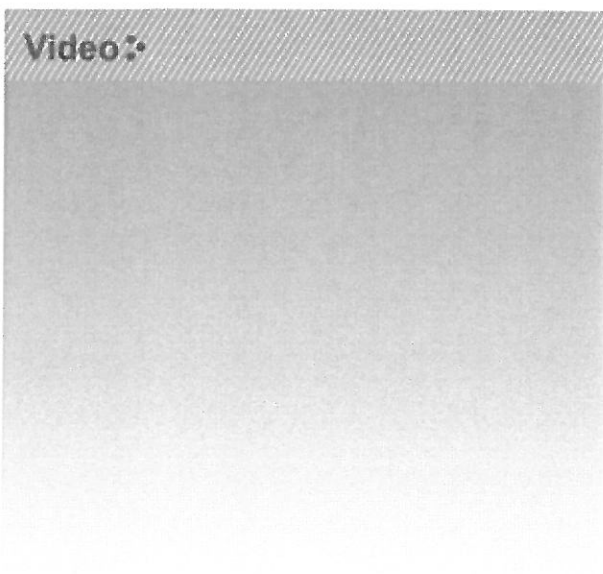
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"We cannot do that," Bullard said.

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"This is the process we all agreed to," Rich said.

The League of Women Voters and other groups that backed Fair Districts also submitted their own maps which also split voters fairly evenly between Senate and congressional districts. Senate Reapportionment Chairman **Don Gaetz**, R-Niceville, repeatedly chastized those groups for not submitting maps when the window for public input was still open.

Categories: None

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Florida House panels finish work on redrawn maps

TALLAHASSEE - House panels tasked with putting forward proposed redraws of the state's political lines finished their work Monday, inching that chamber — which has moved slower than the Senate — closer to a final vote.

Members voted to drastically change the congressional landscape of Northeast Florida, proposing a final three maps that draw incumbents Cliff Stearns and John Mica into Central Florida districts and throwing open the possibility for two new faces in Washington.

(**View** the congressional map finalists [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).)

In the state House, the maps place four First Coast incumbents in two districts, setting up two possible head-to-heads.

Republicans roundly praised the proposals, which they said were a big improvement over the current maps.

"I don't have a favorite. I would be OK with any of the seven," said state Rep. Mike Horner, R-Kissimmee, of the congressional proposals.

All maps were largely opposed by Democrats, some of whom wanted the proposals to go back to the public for their input.

Rep. Mia Jones of Jacksonville, the only area member on the subcommittee redrawing the state House districts, joined her fellow Democrats in voting against moving the maps forward but didn't comment during hearings. Fellow Jacksonville Democrat Reggie Fullwood, the lone area member on the congressional panel, was a no-show and couldn't be reached.

St. Johns County will definitely have new representation in Congress — Mica's Winter Park home is now in a smaller 7th District — but the finalist maps differ on whether one or two people will do so. One map of what would be the new District 6 incorporates all of St. Johns County, including to Julington Creek in the northwest to Ponte Vedra Beach in the Northeast.

In the two others, boundaries of the new district and the mostly Duval District 4 cut through the middle of St. Augustine.

In Duval, two of the maps use Florida 121A (Middle Road, from Callahan to the Georgia border) as a boundary between what are labeled District 3 and District 4. The third map has District 3 stretching west to the Osceola National Forest.

In another tweak, U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown would be drawn out of Volusia and Seminole counties in what would be the 5th District. Her current 3rd District winds from Jacksonville to Orlando and includes nine counties. Brown's redrawn and renumbered district, though, largely maintains its snake-like shape in each of the proposals.

Brown's district also was targeted in the Senate, where Democratic Leader Nan Rich filed a proposed map Monday that drastically alters its shape even more.

The Jacksonville Democrat's district has been at the heart of a fight over redistricting. Her current seat winds from Jacksonville to Orlando and is seen by many as the poster child for districts drawn to protect incumbents.

Map drawers this year must contend with a pair of state constitutional amendments that dictate the new districts remain compact and do not benefit any political party. Brown has filed a lawsuit along with U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Fla., and the Florida House challenging the amendments. She says they will hurt minority representation and are at odds with federal law.

The map filed by Rich, D-Sunrise, cuts Brown's district off at the south end, removing the Orlando area. The northern tip of her district would include Jacksonville, but it does not extend much farther south than Gainesville.

An appeals court on Monday heard oral arguments in Brown's lawsuit.

There were no major regional changes to the state House maps released Monday. Two of the three plans rope Republican Reps. Daniel Davis and Charles McBurney together, and each map places Fullwood and Jones into the same district.

The maps also create a new downtown district that is currently open but includes a house owned by Fullwood.

With the subcommittees finished up with their work, the approved maps will now move to the full House Redistricting Committee. The Senate has moved a bit faster, with a full committee vote set for Wednesday, and a floor vote likely for next week.

The House's Senate Redistricting Subcommittee quickly passed a version of the redrawn map put forward by the Senate. The two House and Senate redistricting committees cut a deal where each would draw their own maps to be accepted by the other chamber.

There are no Jacksonville-area members on the Senate Redistricting Subcommittee.



Senate committee signs off on its redistricting maps

After a bitter debate over a last-minute map produced and withdrawn by Democrats, the Senate Reapportionment Committee on Wednesday voted out its proposals to redraw the political lines for the Senate and Congress for the next 10 years.

The proposals will create a new Hispanic congressional seat in Central Florida, leave intact all of the African-American minority seats in Congress and the state Senate, and retain the Republican majority in both the Senate and congressional delegations.

If adopted by the full Senate next week, as expected, the bills will move to the House where legislative leaders hope they will get final resolution by the end of the month. The legislative maps will then be sent to the Florida Supreme Court, as required, and the congressional map will go to Gov. Rick Scott for his signature.

The court has 30 days to approve or reject the proposal and lawmakers want a chance to rewrite it, if necessary, before session ends March 9.

"Should there be any areas in which the Supreme Court to have another look at the maps, my hope is we could do that while we're still in session," said Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, chairman of the committee. "I don't want to come back for a redistricting session."

Prior to the meeting, Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich, D-Weston, submitted two alternative maps. Her proposals, written the Democratic Party of Florida's help, would slightly reduce the number of Democrats in proposed Senate and Congressional districts, creating competitive Republican seats and two more Democrat-leaning districts than the Republican proposals.

But the proposals unleashed the partisan hostility that had been pent up since the process began seven months ago. Rich abruptly withdrew the amendments, saying instead that she will resubmit them as an amendment when the full chamber votes on the measure Jan. 17.

"I believe we can do a better in reconciling the Voting Rights Act and the Constitutional amendments," she said, a reference to the newly-adopted Fair Districts amendments that prohibit legislators from protecting incumbents or political parties when drawing maps.

The suggestion that senators would be asked to vote on a fresh map they will have only had the weekend to see, drew sharp rebukes from Republicans on the committee.

"I am totally discontent and unhappy with the way this has been handled to get a massive change to a map that I have no idea what it is," said Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormond Beach.

But it was clear that Rich didn't even have the support of her own members for her plan. Her congressional map, for example, would have ended the seven-county stretch that now comprises the district held by U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown and make it more compact but, in turn, reduce the percentage of black voters from 49 percent to 36 percent.

"This would have clearly diminished the ability for African Americans to be elected to office," said Sen. Larcenia Bullard, D-Miami, whose district would have gone from more than 50 percent black under the Senate map to 20 percent black under Rich's plan. Bullard's son hopes to replace her when she leaves because of term limits.

Rich said that she relied on help from staff at the Democratic Party of Florida to draw her maps because Senate Democrats do not have access to the staff that the Republican leadership has. She said they made no attempt to protect incumbents and that Bullard's district "has never been a minority access district. It's been pretty evenly divided" and has become much more Hispanic in population so must change.

Unlike the Republican map, Rich said, the Senate map creates a new minority access seat in Palm Beach County, which could elect another black to the Senate.

Democratic Party Chairman Rod Smith came to Rich's defense and in a statement said he believed her maps comply with the requirements of the new Fair Districts requirements in the Constitution and the federal Voting

Rights Act.

Republican Party of Florida chairman Lenny Curry immediately seized on the Democrats' remarks as "an outrageous demonstration of hypocrisy."

"Florida Democrats say one thing while doing another by pushing maps that favor Democrats and diminish the possibility of African-Americans representing their communities of interest," he said.

The committee voted 22-4 in favor of the Senate map, with four of the 10 Democrats opposed: Rich, Maria Sachs of Delray Beach, Oscar Braynon of Miami and Arthenia Joyner of Tampa.

According to a Herald/Times analysis, the map of the 40-member Senate creates 24 Republican-leaning districts, sacrificing Republican strength in areas now held by 11 of the senators leaving because of term limits. It includes 14 Democrat-leaning districts and two competitive districts that could be considered a toss-up. The map creates a new Hispanic access seat in Central Florida and eight of the districts have 50 percent or more minority voters.

The map could result in some of the chamber's 29 Republicans facing more competitive races in the 40-member House in the 2012 elections. But it is sure to preserve the Republican majority in both the Senate and the Congressional delegation.

The Congressional map, approved by the committee 21-5, creates 15 Republican-leaning districts, 10 Democrat-leaning districts and two competitive districts. Five of the districts have 50 percent or more registered Democratic voters, including the minority majority seats now held by Democratic U.S. Reps. Brown, Alcee Hastings and Frederica Wilson. None have 30 percent or more registered Independent voters.

In six of the proposed districts, 50 percent or more of registered voters are black or Hispanic, including districts now held by U.S. Reps. David Rivera and Mario Diaz Balart, both of whom are Republicans.

2012 Florida Legislature: Session opens with redistricting, budget battles

By Aaron Deslatte, Tallahassee Bureau Chief 10:01 p.m. EST, January 9, 2012

TALLAHASSEE — A legislative session launched two months earlier than usual to redraw Florida's political lines begins Tuesday, with billion-dollar budget problems, destination casino proposals and Gov. Rick Scott's jobs agenda percolating to the surface.

In a midday "State of the State" speech to a joint session of the Legislature, Scott will tout his freshman-year accomplishments and the state's economic rebound, and echo his demand that lawmakers boost education funding while reining in the state's \$21 billion Medicaid program.

To find money for schools, Scott wants to cut about \$1.9 billion from Medicaid, mostly through lower reimbursements to South and Central Florida hospitals. But companies would get \$35 million in tax cuts and an additional \$230 million in incentives to relocate or expand.



But even before Tuesday's speeches and ceremonial pomp, the House and Senate are quietly at odds over redistricting and budget timelines that could delay the work past the 60-day session limit.

House Speaker Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park, is pushing to complete budget work first before agreeing on new political boundaries for 27 congressional and 160 legislative districts. But Senate President Mike Haridopolos, R-Merritt Island, prefers to complete redistricting and delay passage of a final budget until later this spring when state economists might have a better handle on a revenue shortfall now projected at \$1.2 billion to \$1.9 billion.

House committees, meanwhile, advanced three options for new legislative and congressional maps Monday that would create a new Hispanic-leaning congressional seat in Central Florida and make the statewide playing field slightly more Democratic.

Most of the new maps would appear to slightly increase the odds that minority-party Democrats could pick up legislative and congressional seats, although not by enough to reclaim majorities in this year's elections.

The maps also would dramatically reduce the number of districts that cut apart cities and counties — a reflection of Amendments 5 and 6 passed in 2010, which add new standards for compactness and minority voting protections and attempt to take the politics out of an inherently political process.

The maps would all increase the number of congressional districts competitive for Democrats — including two new ones added to accommodate population growth in the 2010 Census — while dramatically reducing the number of cities and counties split apart by Florida's existing 25 congressional districts.

In Florida's current congressional districts, Republicans have a voter-registration edge in 17 of the 25 seats, but that shrinks to 15 or 16 districts under the three proposals.

The proposed maps would also have performed more Democratic in the 2010 gubernatorial and 2008 presidential elections, according to election data. For example, Republican Rick Scott carried 19 of the districts in 2010, but would have won 17 or 18 of the new ones.

The House Congressional Redistricting Subcommittee had seven options for new lines designed to comply with new anti-gerrymandering provisions passed in 2010.

"All seven of these are a major improvement to the existing map," said Chairman John Legg, R-Port Richey, who called the process of selecting three a "non-political" one because lawmakers selected the three options that split the fewest communities.

The committee amended the maps Monday, though, to make slight changes. Among them: removing Volusia and Seminole counties completely from U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown's district, which currently stretches from Jacksonville to Orlando.

But the changes don't address complaints from South Florida Republicans concerned that the proposed boundaries in the 22nd Congressional District would make it more difficult for freshman U.S. Rep. Allen West, R-Plantation, to win re-election.

The Broward-[Palm Beach County](#) district West won in 2010 is evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans, with a large share of independent/no party affiliation voters. Analyses of the proposed new boundaries show Democrats with an edge of 4 to 8 percentage points.

Richard DeNapoli, chairman of the Broward Republican Party, said the shape of the district violates Fair Districts requirements. He wants lawmakers to remove territory in southwestern Broward and add voters along the northern [Palm Beach County](#) coast, arguing that would better reflect existing geographic boundaries.

Sid Dinerstein, chairman of the [Palm Beach County](#) Republican Party, said he shares DeNapoli's concern about the shape of West's district, but he doesn't want any changes to hurt U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, R-Tequesta, in the adjacent 16th District.

House Democrats voted against the plans Monday, arguing the committee should first seek public reaction. While lawmakers held 26 public hearings around the state this summer, they are just now presenting the likely final contours of the plans they will pass during the annual lawmaking session that starts Tuesday.

"We kept hearing 'Where are the maps?' I believe there was an important step which is missing — to take these maps back to some of those locations," said Rep. Dwayne Taylor, D-Daytona Beach. "The citizen participation is, I believe, an important part of the discussion that is missing."

But Republicans said there had been plenty of public discussion, and more to come in the weeks ahead.

"Here are the maps," Legg said. "We're narrowing it down and allowing for more public input along the way."

Reporter [Anthony Man](#) contributed to this report. adeslatte@tribune.com or 850-222-5564



Rod Smith comes to the defense of FDP-drawn maps | Florida Politics

[Rod Smith comes to the defense of FDP-drawn maps](#)

By Aaron Deslatte January 11, 2012 02:43 PM

TALLAHASSEE -- Florida Democratic Party Chairman **Rod Smith** just put a statement defending proposed Senate and congressional redistricting maps that Senate Minority Leader **Nan Rich**, D-Weston, had filed -- then tabled without a vote.

The maps were drawn by his own shop with the help of "national demographers," but have already riled some black Democrats and Republicans alike because they would more evenly spread Democratic voters among more districts -- and create fewer likely to elect minorities in the process, critics like Senate Majority Leader **Andy Gardiner**, R-Orlando, alleged Wednesday.

Smith takes umbrage with that sentiment.

"We believe Senator Nan Rich's maps comply with the governing principals of the Voting Rights Act while at the same time reconciling the voter-approved principles and guidelines of Amendments 5 & 6. Furthermore, Sen. Rich's maps stand in stark contrast to those submitted by Republican Senator Don Gaetz. Sen. Gaetz's proposed maps represent incumbent protection and partisan advantage at its worst -- the very things Florida voters overwhelmingly rejected," Smith said in a statement.

"The suggestion that Sen. Rich's maps are retrogressive in any way is without merit. We believe our maps are clearly in compliance with the Fair Districts standards, more so than any other maps submitted to date. Our guiding principles prohibit us from racial gerrymandering, incumbent protection or partisan advantage."

Categories: None

You share in the SunSentinel.com community, so we just ask that you keep things civil. Leave out the personal attacks. Do not use profanity, ethnic or racial slurs, or take shots at anyone's sexual orientation or religion. If you can't be nice, we reserve the right to remove your material and ban users who violate our [Terms of Service](#).

Will federal court wade into Florida's redistricting work? – Central Florida Political Pulse – Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — Lawyers representing the Florida House, U.S. Reps. **Corrine Brown** and **Mario Diaz-Balart**, state House and Senate Democrats, and voting-rights groups squared off in an ongoing legal fight last week over the Fair Districts standards the Legislature is using now to draw new congressional maps.

The lawsuit brought by Brown, D-Jacksonville, and Diaz-Balart, R-Miami, has been largely overshadowed by the redistricting drama playing out in Tallahassee today. It specifically challenges whether Amendment 6 dealing with congressional lines intrudes on the federal constitutional relationship between Congress and the state Legislature, which is tasked with re-drawing them. Miami Judge **Ursula Ungaro** ruled last fall that voters had the right to place the new anti-gerrymandering standards on lawmakers, and the Brown/Diaz-Balart legal team appealed.

But if the federal appeals court sides with the two congressional members and House Speaker **Dean Cannon**, who has joined in the challenge, it could throw a serious monkey wrench into the process of negotiating final maps.

At least, that's the hope of the chief lawyer for Brown and Diaz-Balart, **Stephen Cody**.

Cody said he expects the court to rule as soon as two weeks from now. If the U.S. Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals overturns the lower judge, state legislators would be theoretically free to amend the congressional maps without the dictates of Amendment 6, he said.

"That would allow it. They wouldn't necessarily have to, but without these constraints we could draw a different and better plan," Cody said. "They could do that next session. They could do that in 2013. Or at any point or in 2022."

Or, it could happen as soon as in House-Senate conference meetings, where lawmakers will probably have to work out a range of differences between their congressional plans in the weeks ahead.

"Federal law does not put any restrictions on a legislature on when they can re-draw the maps," Cody said. "They can re-draw them every two years if they wanted."

House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford**, R-Wesley Chapel, has said repeatedly that lawmakers would draw the congressional maps as if Fair Districts applied and would not let the ongoing litigation affect their work-product.

Current Speaker Cannon, R-Winter Park, said as much last week to the *Orlando Sentinel* editorial board when he was defending his decision to keep plugging away at the litigation.

The federal appeal "has nothing to do with the maps that we're drawing now," Cannon said Friday. "We have followed [Amendments] 5 and 6 and will continue to follow 5 and 6 all through the election."

Cannon said he was still pursuing the lawsuit because future lawmakers would be bound to the standards, and he felt an important federal constitutional right of Congress to regulate elections was in conflict with the new state constitutional standards.

"Our rights are at stake. They are implicated, and we should be at that table," he said.

Cannon's office has not released a complete accounting of the ongoing taxpayer cost of the legal fight against Fair Districts (which began long before the current lawsuit that was filed the day after voters passed the amendments in 2010).

But [the Transparency Florida Web site](#) indicates the three law firms helping out with the Fair District fight — Gray Robinson, Latham & Watkins, and Miguel De Grandy PA — have been paid \$1.28 million since Cannon took over in 2010. Cannon's office said that figure also includes redistricting "prep work" unrelated to the

litigation, and in support of Amendment 7, the House's attempt to place another standard on the 2010 ballot "clarifying" Fair Districts.

Maps produced under new redistricting standards leave Democrats divided, GOP nervous - Florida

By Mary Ellen Klas

Posted on Monday, 01.16.12

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TALLAHASSEE -- After a long-fought battle to impose redistricting standards, proponents of the Fair Districts constitutional amendments have new maps — and they're not what they had hoped for.

But the first maps to be voted on by the full Senate this week are not unexpected either.

The maps — one for the state Senate, the other for Congress — each leave intact the controversial minority districts that consolidate Democratic voters in oddly-shaped districts. They have deeply divided the Democratic caucus and have forced Democrats to rely on the court to sort the issue out.

"The Legislature's proposals were drawn in violation of the new criteria," said Dan Gelber, a former Democratic state senator from Miami who is now legal counsel to Fair Districts Florida.

The Democrat-leaning Fair Districts group was responsible for gathering petitions to put Amendments 5 and 6 on the November 2010 ballot, and won the support of 63 percent of Florida voters. The anti-gerrymandering amendments prohibit lawmakers from protecting incumbents and political parties, require them to protect minority voting strength and keep county and city boundaries intact whenever possible.

After legislators complete their maps, the Florida Supreme Court must decide if state Senate and House proposals follow the new constitutional standards. A court is also likely to decide the fate of the congressional map, because any Florida voter can file a lawsuit challenging the congressional map as failing to comply with the new standards.

Groups that backed the Fair Districts reforms, including the League of Women Voters, the Latino-based Democracia, Common Cause and the Florida Democratic Party, have submitted alternative maps that Senate leaders have not adopted and could challenge the Senate plan.

"The process followed by the Senate is not unlike what we've always seen before — and that is incumbents continue to draw seats that are more favorable to incumbents and the majority party continues to widen or cement its majority status," said Rod Smith, chairman of the Florida Democratic Party, also a former state senator.

While Democrats sweat it out, Republicans who control the Senate are not sleeping comfortably yet either.

The prospect of a court forcing them to rewrite their maps has Sen. Don Gaetz, the chairman of the redistricting committee, urging the Senate to extend the 60-day session — initially for budget reasons — to give them enough time to keep everything in play if the court forces them to rewrite their maps.

"We could still have time within 60 consecutive days to have a second bite at the apple...to repair any problems with the House, Senate or congressional redistricting plans," Gaetz told the Herald/Times last week.

Gaetz and other Republicans defend their maps and point to the bi-partisan support they've received when the two plans were voted out of committee with either four or five Democrats in support. The same Democrats are expected to cross party lines to vote out the maps.

"The Senate did a wonderful job making sure they comply with keeping African American seats and Hispanic seats intact," said Sen. Gary Siplin, an Orlando Democrat who will vote for both maps.

Sen. Eleanor Sobel, D-Hollywood, said she voted on the maps "to move the process along" so that the new political lines will be completed by the June 4 deadline for legislative candidates to file for office.

But Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich, who withdrew her proposed alternative maps last week, said she won't be supporting the Senate maps.

"When every Republican incumbent gets a stronger seat, I question whether it respects the will of the voters," she said. "It's incumbency protection."

Susan MacManus, a University of South Florida professor who has written a book on Florida's redistricting process, said that she believes that whatever maps are approved, proponents of Fair Districts will be disappointed because the amendments attempted to be too many things for too many people.

"From the beginning, Floridians expectations about the proposal were splintered," she said. "For some it was to protect minority representation. For others, it was to make districts more compact. And for others it was to bring more fairness and offer a more even playing field. In the end, the process really will never please everyone."

Staff writer Mary Ellen Klas can be reached at meklas@MiamiHerald.com and on Twitter [@MaryEllenKlas](https://twitter.com/MaryEllenKlas)

Legislature's redistricting handiwork destined for courts

orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/os-redistricting-maps-court-20120116,0,7592006.story

TALLAHASSEE — After more than two years of bickering over reforms meant to curb political abuses, the Florida Senate on Tuesday plans to debate maps for congressional and legislative districts that preserve Republican majorities and, its authors say, meet legal muster with Fair Districts.

But it will be far from the final word.

Already, voter-rights groups, including the League of Women Voters, Common Cause and Democracia, are laying the groundwork to challenge the Senate and congressional maps in court once the Legislature passes them.

Florida Democrats have also weighed in with maps that would create more districts favoring their candidates, while doing so at the possible expense of a handful of the black seats that helped the GOP gain legislative majorities in the 1990s.

With no hope of passing either plan through the Republican-dominated Legislature, the target audience for both plans is the judiciary.

"This is not a beauty contest between maps. In court, we have to show there were alternatives, there are alternatives, and this is a way you could comply. We think we did that," said Florida Democratic Party Chairman Rod Smith.

"It was very clear to us they were never going to pass a map that did anything other than protect incumbents and cement past partisan advantage."

Likewise, Dan Gelber, a former legislator and general counsel for Fair Districts Now, said his membership submitted maps last week "to give the Legislature an opportunity to pass a map that complies with the criteria" of amendments 5 and 6.

But Republicans in charge of redistricting have fired back at the "cynical litigation strategy" by arguing the new maps disenfranchise black voters and that the deadline for public maps passed more than two months ago.

"I think it's curious that maps pulled like rabbits out of a hat at the very end of the process would be offered 64 days after the deadline ... and six months after the first of 28 requests," said Senate Reapportionment Chairman Don Gaetz, R-Niceville.

By and large, the GOP-drawn and alternative maps share important similarities: all would create a new Central Florida congressional district likely to elect a Hispanic and draw districts that would likely add only a handful of Democrats to the state's congressional delegation (now split 19-to-6 Republican) and Senate (now 28-to-12 Republican.)

But Democrats say that spreading their voters over more districts will make them more competitive in the future.

Timing is everything in redistricting because the maps need to be finished by the time candidate qualifying begins June 4.

The U.S. Justice Department will have 60 days to review both legislative and congressional plans once adopted. Florida's legislative maps must be reviewed first by the Florida Supreme Court. While the congressional plans go straight to DOJ once Gov. Rick Scott signs them, a legal challenge to Amendment 6 on a federal appeals court fast-track could change the rules before House and Senate negotiators hammer out their final differences in February.

So, critics will have several venues for making their case — that the maps, while on the surface appearing to adhere to the Fair Districts directives of drawing seats more compactly and protecting minorities, still intentionally advantage the party in power.

Both amendments 5 and 6, adopted in 2010 by 63 percent of Florida voters, ban lawmakers from drawing maps that have the "intent or effect" of diminishing voting rights or show "intent" to aiding incumbents or political parties.

"Intent" will be the operative word, because critics of the plans will need to demonstrate in court that the Legislature knowingly developed maps that favored their own incumbents or parties. The GOP will argue the Democratic alternative does the same thing.

An Orlando Sentinel analysis suggests the Republican-drawn maps for Senate seats and congressional districts that the Senate will debate Tuesday would advantage the GOP in future elections. But the authors argue that is unavoidable, given where people live.

In fact, the differences Tuesday would be minimal.

The GOP maps would raise the number of state Senate seats with Republican voter majorities from 21 to 22. Similarly, Scott carried 25 of the current districts in 2010, and would take 26 of the new ones. In 2008, a big Democratic turnout powered Barack Obama to a 20-20 split with Republican John McCain; McCain would have won 24 of the proposed seats.

The Democratic maps filed last week by Senate Minority Leader Nan Rich, D-Weston, would create an even 20-20 registration split. Scott would have won just 23 districts and McCain 21.

The same is true of the congressional maps. In the GOP majority maps, Republicans outnumber Democrats in 14 of 27 districts; the Democrat version would reverse that. Scott would have won 16 districts under the GOP plan and 15 under the Democratic one. And McCain would have carried 16 seats under the GOP plan, to 13 under the Democratic alternative.

Both versions create a new Hispanic-leaning congressional seat in Orange, Osceola and Polk counties, while rendering the seat of U.S. Rep. Allen West, R-Plantation, more Democratic. But the Democratic map designs a Hispanic seat in Orlando without making all the surrounding GOP districts safer, as the Republican version does.

Instead of the 26 seats Scott would win under the majority-proposed map, he would capture 23 under the Democratic version. And instead of giving McCain 24 seats, the Democratic alternative would create 21 seats that would have gone for the GOP presidential ticket.

The Democratic maps achieve more partisan parity at the expense of black incumbents in at least two seats: the state Senate district currently held by Larcenia Bullard, D-Miami, and the congressional district of Corrine Brown, D-Jacksonville.

Brown is fighting Amendment 6 in a federal appeals court — with the financial support of the Florida House.

The Democratic map would re-shape her nine-county seat to take in more of Jacksonville and end just south of Gainesville instead of meandering south to Orlando, as it does in both the current map and the GOP-favored proposal. The percentage of black voters would fall from 49.8 percent to 36.2 percent.

Similarly, Bullard's district, which runs north from Key West along western Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties, would see its black voters drop from 29 percent to 20 percent in the Democratic map, while Latino voters would remain at 43 percent. The Republican-favored map boosts blacks to 35 percent and lowers Hispanic numbers to 40 percent.

Bullard is term-limited and her son, Rep. Dwight Bullard, D-Miami, is expected to run for her seat. Last week, she objected that the Democratic map would diminish black voting strength. Republicans joined in, and by the end of last week, Rich had decided not to bring the maps up for a floor vote Tuesday.

Smith said Bullard's seat was never a "protected" district and their map reflected the reality that Hispanics have become a larger voting bloc in western Miami-Dade County than blacks. He argues the Fair Districts amendments did not create an iron-clad linkage to preserve the same exact minority numbers in the legislature, just that "voters have the opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice."

The majority-drawn Senate map "cements a permanent Republican majority at 24, and every incumbent that is up for re-election has a stronger seat than the one they have now. Their answer to that is it just turned out that way," Smith said.

But Sen. David Simmons, R-Maitland, said the Democratic map "sacrifices minorities for the purposes of getting a political advantage, and amendments 5 and 6 prohibit that.

"How in the world can they stand before a judge and say they haven't diminished minority voting rights?"

adeslatte@tribune.com or 850-222-5564.



Florida Senate will vote on redistricting maps this week that aren't what some hoped for

TALLAHASSEE — After a long-fought battle to impose redistricting standards, proponents of the Fair Districts constitutional amendments have new maps — and they're not what they had hoped for.

But the first maps to be voted on by the full Senate this week are not unexpected either.

The maps — one for the state Senate, the other for Congress — each leave intact the controversial minority districts that consolidate Democratic voters in oddly shaped districts. They have deeply divided the Democratic caucus and have forced Democrats to rely on the court to sort the issue out.

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While Democrats sweat it out, Republicans who control the Senate are not sleeping comfortably yet either.

The prospect of a court forcing them to redo their maps has Sen. Don Gaetz, the chairman of the redistricting committee, urging the Senate to extend the 60-day session — initially for budget reasons — to give them enough time to keep everything in play if the court rejects their plans.

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"For some it was to protect minority representation. For others, it was to make districts more compact. And for others it was to bring more fairness and offer a more even playing field. In the end, the process really will never please everyone."

Mary Ellen Klas can be reached at meklas@MiamiHerald.com and on Twitter @MaryEllenKlas.

Florida Senate passes its own new map, over complaints of racial 'packing' – Central Florida Political Pulse – Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE – Over complaints that its work continued decades-old gerrymandering, Senate Republicans rammed through a proposed map for their own 40 seats that more evenly divides population gains over the last decade and maintains an electoral advantage for the majority-party.

The Senate map, SJR 1176, was fast-tracked 34-6 after a daylong debate in which Democrats said the majority was violating the Fair Districts reforms voters passed in 2010. But Senate President **Mike Haridopolos**, R-Merritt Island, called Florida's example a "model for America."

The Senate map would create 22 Senate districts with GOP voter-majorities but 24 districts that voted for Republican **John McCain** in 2008 and are likely to be safe Republican seats.

Some Democrats complained the maps kept in place racially "packed" districts that ensure more Democratic votes will be concentrated in fewer Senate districts – a process that was perfectly legal in past redistricting cycles, but was prohibited by the anti-gerrymandering reform.

"For the last 20 years, this kind of packing of African-American voters has been used to ensure the election of a disproportionate number of Republican candidates," said Sen. **Arthenia Joyner**, D-Tampa.

The Senate maps have five seats likely to elect blacks, five that should elect Latino candidates, and one in Miami-Dade that could go either way.

"It also ensures that we will be in a perpetual minority in the House and the Senate," Joyner said, "with little opportunity to advance an agenda that will benefit the very people we represent."

Republicans currently have a 28-12 advantage in the Senate, even though Democrats have a roughly 500,000-vote edge among the state's 11 million registered voters.

While Fair Districts requires lawmakers to protect minority voting rights, it also bars drawing maps that intentionally help incumbents or political parties.

Republicans have said the new contours reflect where people live, and the public input they have received over the last six months.

Sen. **Evelyn Lynn**, R-Ormond Beach, called it "unbelievable" that black lawmakers were complaining and voting against a map that preserved minority seats. "How you could do that I do not know, because I could not do that."

But the Democratic opposition was hardly united. Democrats **Gary Siplin** of Orlando, **Bill Montford** of Tallahassee, **Larcenia Bullard** of Miami, **Gwen Margolis** of Miami Beach, **Eleanor Sobel** of Hollywood, and **Jeremy Ring** of Margate all broke with their party leader and supported the maps.

One Republican, **Paula Dockery** of Lakeland, voted against the map.

Senate Majority Leader **Andy Gardiner**, R-Orlando, called out the League of Women Voters for producing a map last week that could have led to fewer minority senators by spreading Democratic voters over more seats.

"They diminish minority access in the seats," Gardiner said.

The House is still mulling over options for its own maps, and is expected to take the Senate plan as passed. After that, they head to the Florida Supreme Court where Senate Democratic Leader **Nan Rich**, D-Weston, predicted they would run afoul of the law.

"I believe the map does protect parties and incumbents," she said.

Democrats pointed to seats that would remain safe GOP turf and could have been drawn more compactly within a single county.

Sen. **Oscar Braynon**, D-Miami Gardens, questioned why the GOP had carved out District 29 stretching from just east of Fort Lauderdale north to take in most of coastal Palm Beach County when it could have been drawn entirely in Palm Beach.

Surrounded by districts that tilt Democratic, the new-look District 29 is similar to Republican Sen. Ellyn Bogdanoff's current District 25.

The new district is a little more of a straight line in Palm Beach, but would still likely be a swing seat, with 37 percent Republican voters and 35 percent Democrat.

Senate Reapportionment Chairman Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, said while that may have been possible, it would impact an adjacent African American-leaning seat that Republican lawmakers say is protected by Fair Districts.

"Almost anything is possible, although not everything is legal or sensible," he said.

Sen. Audrey Gibson, D-Jacksonville, questioned why Seminole and part of northeast Orange counties were contained in their own District 13 instead of stretching the seat down to include parts of downtown Orlando, where "people drive to work."

The seat is 70 percent white, and would tilt Republican based on voter registration and past performance. It is also sandwiched between a District 12 in western Orange likely to elect a back senator and District 8 in Volusia which could wind up a swing seat.

"We have to have a reason why we do something," Gaetz shot back, asking why no members of the public requested such a district.

"There was no reason to do so, and no public testimony urging us to do so."

Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland, chimed in to point out that Polk had been divided among four different Senate districts when 33 of the 67 counties had not been divided at all.

But drawing the maps from one end of the peninsula to other made it impossible to keep Polk compact, she was told.

"No matter where you start," Gaetz replied, "you end up in Polk County."

Law Blog Fireside: Jenner's Paul Smith, Redistricting Pro - Law Blog

By Joe Palazzolo

By Joe Palazzolo

Redistricting battles are unfolding across the country, and Paul Smith, chairman of Jenner & Block's appellate and Supreme Court practice, is in the middle of several of them. The firm is well-known for its representation of Democrats in the once-a-decade flurry of litigation.

The [most recent](#) case, in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit, concerns a redistricting amendment to the Florida constitution. Smith and his colleagues are representing the Florida NAACP, which is defending the amendment against lawsuits brought by the Florida House of Representatives and two members of Congress.

Smith [argued](#) the case in the 11th Circuit last week. We caught up with him recently.



Law Blog: What's at stake in the Florida case?

Paul Smith: The voters passed an initiative amending the Florida constitution to prevent the legislature from drawing lines to favor any political party. The U.S. Constitution gives the legislature the power to set the time, place and manner of federal elections. The question is whether a law passed by the voters through an initiative counts as an action through the legislature for that purpose. The answer, I think, is going to be "yes" because the court has broadened the term to include any aspect of state law-making.

LB: Assuming the court agrees, what's the next step?

Smith: I would imagine that when the legislature draws new maps everyone and their brother will be filing briefs [in the state supreme court], and then there will be additional litigation in trial court.

LB: You're also involved in the Texas redistricting litigation. The Supreme Court recently [heard arguments](#) in the case, and a panel of judges in D.C. is reviewing the Republican-controlled state legislature's proposed maps as we speak. What are the judges looking for?

Smith: They are basically looking at whether there's enough evidence that the map was free of discriminatory intent and did not retrogress with respect to minority voting power, and the state has to prove it...We represent one group of minority Democrats that is trying to protect a particular state senate district and another group challenging the congressional legislative map as unfair.

LB: You graduated law school in the late 1970s, so this is, what, your third cycle of redistricting work?

Smith: I was very involved 10 years ago and pretty involved ten years before that. It's like a seasonal festival, so you have to do other things in between.

LB: In the last cycle, you argued two cases before the Supreme Court [involving maps in Pennsylvania and Texas].



Jenner & Block
Paul Smith

Smith: We were trying to get the court to accept the proposition that the Constitution limits partisan gerrymandering, but we could never quite get five votes for that. There were four on our side, four that said these claims shouldn't be brought to court at all, and Justice Kennedy was kind of in between, holding up the possibility that some gerrymandering might be unconstitutional but not really telling us which test to apply.

LB: There's another issue that could find its way back to the court.

Smith: Looming over the whole process is the prospect that the Supreme Court may consider Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. [Under Section 5, state and local governments deemed to have historically suppressed minority votes must obtain Justice Department approval before altering election practices.] There are cases being prosecuted right now in the District of Columbia challenging the constitutionality of the section that are headed for the Supreme Court in the next six months or a year.

LB: You don't sound too hopeful.

Smith: People were quite surprised that they didn't [strike it down] last time. But we'll have to wait and see.

Senate approves redistricting map with bi-partisan vote despite criticism | Florida politics blog: The Buzz

A majority of Democrats crossed party lines Tuesday as the state Senate gave overwhelming approval to two redistricting maps that critics say protects incumbents despite new standards intended to increase political competition.

Seven Democrats joined 27 Republicans as the Senate approved its state Senate and congressional maps by a 34-6 vote. One Republican, Sen. Paula Dockery of Lakeland, voted against the maps.

Senate President Mike Haridopolos called it one of the Senate's "finest hours" and joined in the chorus of kudos for incoming Senate President Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, who shepherded the map-drawing effort.

The maps must adhere to the two new Fair Districts amendments that prohibit incumbency protection, preserve minority voting strength, and require lawmakers to keep cities and counties more compact. If passed by the House and validated by the Florida Supreme Court and U.S. Department of Justice, they will reshape the state's political lines for the next 10 years.

The Senate's maps make way for two new congressional districts earned because of the state's population growth -- bringing the total Florida delegation to 27. They pave the way for new Hispanic-based congressional and state Senate districts in Central Florida. And while they make a handful of Republican seats more competitive, they also preserve the GOP majority in both the Congressional delegation and the state Senate.

"The plan before you is not a Republican plan or a Democratic plan," said Gaetz, a Niceville Republican. "This is truly a non-partisan plan, blending the insights of both parties."

But the Senate maps drew sharp rebukes from a bitterly divided Democratic caucus. Seven of the chamber's 12 Democrats joined the Republicans to support their staff-written maps: Sens. Eleanor Sobel of Hollywood, Larcenia Bullard of Miami, Gwen Margolis of Miami, Jerney Ring of Margate, Bill Montford of Tallahassee, Audrey Gibson of Jacksonville, Gary Siplin of Orlando.

But Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich of Weston, Sen. Arthenia Joyner of Tampa and Sen. Chris Smith of Fort Lauderdale blasted the Senate maps for violating the intent of the redistricting standards and the a coalition of citizens groups that backed the Fair Districts amendments lashed out against the vote as an attempt to "protect the party in power."

Rich chided lawmakers for drawing districts that "are tremendously familiar" to the 2002 maps that voters rejected when they imposed strict redistricting standards by a 63 percent vote in 2010.

"The only districts that I believe look tremendously different are the termed out seats, where there is no incumbent," she said. "It certainly is odd that we, unlike the House, have no members who are not termed out who are not in conflict with each other or have not significantly moved their district."

Joyner accused them of packing districts with more minority voters than necessary saying that "bleaches the surrounding districts and limits the influence of minorities overall."

"The Legislature is poised to use the pretext of minority protection to advance an agenda that seeks to preserve incumbency and pack minority voting seats in order to benefit a particular party," Joyner said.

But Gaetz and other Republicans firmly defended their maps and called the Democrats' allegations "factually not true." Gaetz countered that the maps proposed by Rich and the coalition of Fair District supporters would "do violence to existing minority opportunity districts."

The volley of charges, answers and countercharges, continued throughout a six-hour debate until it was clear that both sides would agree on one thing: the courts will decide.

Under state law, the Florida Supreme Court must review the legislative maps and will be asked to determine if they comply with the new redistricting standards outlined in Amendment 5. Any voter in the state may also file suit to challenge the congressional map in state court to determine if they are in line with the standards of Amendment 6.

Senate leaders did not include voter registration information when they drew their maps, but the Herald/Times looked at how the proposed Senate districts performed in the past two elections and found that of the 27 congressional districts, 15 of them would strongly favor Republicans, based on the 2008 and 2010 elections. Five of the current Republican districts would become more Democratic, including one held by U.S. Rep. Allen West.

In the state Senate, the Herald/Times analysis shows that 24 of the 40 Senate districts are solidly Republican based on performance in the last two elections and 14 are Democratic — up from the current 12 held by Democrats.

Gaetz opposed Amendments 5 and 6 and voted against it, as did most of the legislature's Republicans, but on Tuesday he said the amendments brought positive change. Because of the new standards, the Senate's districts are now more compact, have preserved minority districts and were drawn "for the first time in history" without the intent to protect incumbents or political parties.

With the fear of having any backroom deal expose them to charges of incumbency protection, the new standards also led legislators to adopt a redistricting strategy that involved 26 public hearings and a process that invited the public to submit 157 proposed maps. An estimate 3000 voters provided input, Gaetz said.

"Your committee traveled farther, reached out to more Floridians, drew larger crowds of concerned citizens and heard more testimony than any redistricting panel in Florida history," Gaetz said.

The strategy of Fair Districts proponents, however, was less engaged. They complained that legislators should have written their maps earlier – to allow for the inevitable court challenge and avoid interfering with the deadline for candidates to file for office on June 4. And they offered up an alternative to the Senate maps only at the last minute, when it was clear they didn't like the Senate plan.

"We delayed because we hoped the Legislature would follow the letter of the law," said Deirdre MacNab, president of the League of Women Voters of Florida on Tuesday.

But the strategy clearly divided Democrats as well. While the NAACP proposed a map that retained many of the sprawling minority districts in the Senate and Congress, the maps proposed by Rich and the Fair Districts coalition diminished the number of black voters consolidated into Democratic districts but offered Democrats the opportunity to compete in more districts throughout the state.

"That last minute surprise proposal was so flawed that not even one Democrat would introduce it," Gaetz said.

The maps now go to the House, which has scheduled a workshop on its proposals for state House and congressional maps for Friday and does not plan to take a vote on its proposals until Jan. 27.

Polk a Loser in Redistricting Plans Approved By Senate

Published: Tuesday, January 17, 2012 at 4:42 p.m.

LAKELAND | The Florida Senate approved the shape of its 40 districts Tuesday with state Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland, voting against the plan and Lakeland officials considering a challenge, perhaps even a lawsuit.

The new redistricting measure splits Polk County into four Senate districts with only one containing a majority of Polk residents. Lakeland is split among three different Senate districts.

Polk County also is split across four congressional districts in the Senate version, with none having a majority of Polk voters.

Final boundaries for congressional districts will be decided later in negotiations between the Senate and state House.

But what was approved by the senators for their own districts will become the law unless a court challenge or the Justice Department overturns it.

House and Senate leaders agreed not to challenge each other's redrawing of their own districts.

For several decades, Polk County has had two state Senate districts anchored within its boundaries. County and city officials have complained for several weeks after the district maps were unveiled that under the Senate plan, Polk will lose a great deal of influence and clout in state government.

Lakeland City Attorney Tim McCausland told city commissioners Tuesday they may want to consider a challenge to the Senate redistricting plan.

"I think they may want to look at reacting to any maps (like the Senate's) in which Lakeland's clout is marginalized or diluted," he said.

McCausland said he will offer specific steps that the commissioners could consider after he researches the options. He said the Fair Districts amendments approved by the state's voters in 2010 might be one option in any court action.

"Amendments 5 and 6 (Fair Districts) did set some new standards," he said.

One of those standards is not to split political districts and communities, where possible.

Dockery also opposed the congressional redistricting plan that passed the Senate in a 34-6 vote Tuesday. It would lessen Polk County's influence in the 12th Congressional District. Dockery was the only Republican to vote against the plan.

The 12th District, held by U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross, R-Lakeland, a close friend of Dockery's, is pushed farther south, lessening the number of Polk voters in the district.

"It was a lonely battle for Polk County," Dockery said.

"Both do not meet the requirements of Amendments 5 and 6," she said.

The redrawn District 12 includes pieces of 11 counties and most of Lakeland. The Senate leadership said it was a rural district.

"But Lakeland is a city of 100,000 and it is in the district while they removed a city in Charlotte County with 54,000, saying it was too urban," Dockery said. "Even with Lakeland, there are less Polk County voters in the district."

[Bill Rufty can be reached at bill.rufty@theledger.com or 802-7523.]

Weatherford asks for Democratic redistricting votes, pledges not to mow over them | Florida Politics

TALLAHASSEE -- House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford** asked minority-party Democrats for their votes Wednesday, and said it "was not in the plan" to roll over their objections when the re-drawn political maps hit the House floor.

Weatherford's committee will workshop three alternatives for House and congressional plans this Friday, all of which would appear to create more competitive Democratic seats but maintain a GOP-tilt to the statewide playing field. The committee won't cast votes until Jan. 27, and House floor votes are planned a week later.

Senate Republican leaders on Wednesday used their two-thirds majority to steamroll Democrats on its maps, forcing final floor votes instead of the normal procedure of questioning and amending a bill and then waiting at least one day to cast final votes.

At a meeting of the House Democratic Caucus Wednesday, lawmakers wanted to know from Weatherford if they could expect the same treatment.

"It seemed procedurally, the majority party surprised the minority party," asked Rep. **Richard Steinberg**, R-Miami Beach. "Do you expect that to happen in the House as well?"

"The only way I anticipate us rolling to third reading would be if that's what you guys wanted to do," the Wesley Chapel Republican replied. "If there was an agreement between the two parties and our leaders we would, but that is not part of the plan."

Weatherford also asked the Democrats to consider voting for the House districts as a showing of support for the process that produced them.

"I would ask the caucus to strongly consider supporting the House map," he said. "I understand some of you might not like everything about it. I can assure you there are a lot of members of my caucus who do not like everything about it."

Weatherford told reporters after the meeting that "drawing maps that are fair and legal it can sometimes cause issues where you have two members running in the same district. You may have members who don't live in their district. ...

"That's probably unfortunate, but the truth is in order for us to draw legal maps, we can't pay attention to those types of things. I'm not here to try and draw people into their seats."

Before the caucus meeting started, several House Democrats grumbled they couldn't voice concerns with the map in the meeting because reporters were present.

"We're continuing our 'listening tour,'" incoming House Minority Leader **Perry Thurston**, D-Plantation, cautioned his members before Weatherford's briefing.

"Does that mean he won't make the changes I want?" joked Rep. **Geraldine Thompson**, D-Orlando.

One crazy redistricting plan

Published: Thursday, January 19, 2012 at 1:00 a.m.

The congressional district boundaries proposed by the Florida Senate are flawed and unacceptable.

The plan was approved, 34-6, this week by the Senate. Only one Republican, Paula Dockery of Lakeland, was opposed; unfortunately, Mike Bennett and Nancy Detert, the Republican senators representing Manatee and Sarasota counties, voted in favor.

Fortunately, the House of Representatives will consider the plan and can negotiate with the Senate to make changes. Also, the final bill will be reviewed by the governor and the courts.

Nevertheless, the Senate plan is troubling because:

- It would void the boundaries that currently place nearly all of Manatee and Sarasota counties in compact District 13.

The existing district reflects the mutual political and economic interests of Manatee and Sarasota — in addition to those of Desoto and Hardee counties, which share inland, rural characteristics.

- It would create an east-west line — following the path of Interstate 75 — dividing Manatee and Sarasota counties into coastal and inland districts.

As a result:

1. West of Interstate 75, Sarasota and Manatee counties, and part of Charlotte County, would be placed in a new District 13 that hugs the Gulf coast.
2. East of Interstate 75, Manatee and Sarasota counties, and part of Charlotte, would be moved into a sprawling District 12, reaching inland far across the state.

The greatest impact would be in Manatee, where 73,000 people — 23 percent of the county's population — would shift into District 12. Despite that significant population, Manatee would constitute only 10 percent of the new district populace.

District 12 also would include Hardee and DeSoto, then stretch farther east to include all of Highlands and most of Glades and Okeechobee counties.

The entire district would include all or parts of 11 counties. The district would extend northeast to cover part of Polk County, including the area where the District 12 incumbent, U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross, lives. The southernmost portion of the new district would reach into Lee County east of I-75.

This is crazy.

One side effect of this plan: Lakewood Ranch, one of Southwest Florida's fastest-growing mixed-use communities, would be in the same congressional district with rural counties more than halfway across the state.

Another impact: The city of Venice, which bounds both sides of the interstate, would be divided into two districts, with the area east of I-75 going into District 12.

Manatee and Sarasota counties are connected by an integrated economy, a full-service airport, water-sharing agreements, a transportation-planning organization, bicounty social-service agencies and arts and cultural institutions. They should be in the same congressional district.

- The Senate plan also would divide Manatee County into three congressional districts. Currently, a sliver of District 11 reaches down from Hillsborough County — crossing Tampa Bay, literally — into minority neighborhoods in Palmetto and Bradenton. (Polk County, in Central Florida, would be cut into four districts.)

Some political analysts argue that a county's influence in Congress can be expanded if it has more representatives.

But, under the proposed plan, Manatee's population would not constitute anything close to a majority of a single congressional district. That factor would, we fear, diminish Manatee's political strength and, thus, its representation.

Failing the tests

The Legislature must reconfigure congressional and state legislative districts every 10 years, following the U.S. Census. In the census, Florida gained two congressional seats due to population growth.

Redistricting is guided by amendments to the Florida Constitution, judicial oversight, and state and federal laws — and it is influenced by high-stakes political pressure.

The process is difficult, and at least some regions always have gripes.

But the Senate's plan fails to meet two of the basic provisions of two constitutional amendments approved by Florida voters in 2010.

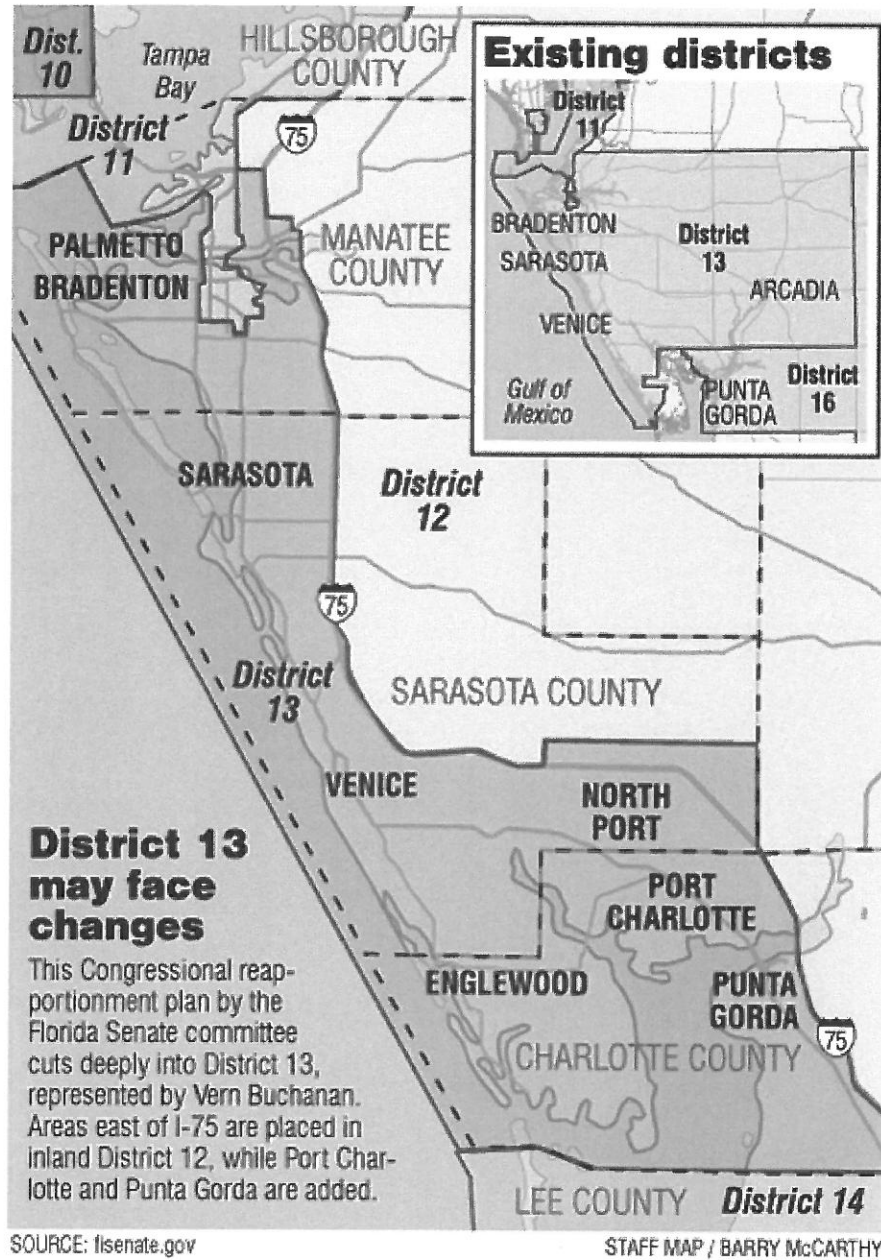
Those provisions stated: "districts shall be compact; and districts shall, where feasible, utilize existing political and geographical boundaries."

The Senate plan doesn't meet either test in Sarasota, Polk, Manatee and Charlotte counties — and that is unacceptable.

To view the proposed districts in detail, go to: www.flsenate.gov/Session/Redistricting/

Redistricting plan would carve up Saras

By Jeremy Wallace, Herald-Tribune
Wednesday, January 18, 2012



Manatee County's fastest-growing communities east of Interstate 75, including I from Bradenton and included with a new congressional district centered in Polk through the Florida Legislature.

And Sarasota County, for the first time in 20 years, would be cut into two congressional districts of I-75 mixed in a district touching 10 other counties.

Manatee's political power would likely be diluted under the plan, which has passed moves to the House. The county would be divided among three congressional districts and not make up more than 30 percent of the total in any of them.

As a result, voters in east Manatee and eastern Sarasota would have less chance to get to Congress, fewer opportunities to see their congressional representative and a toll on roads, the veterans' cemetery and other community needs.

"It makes no sense," said Manatee County Commissioner Carol Whitmore. "I'm

Whitmore said as much of Sarasota and Manatee counties as possible should be kept together as they had for the past 20 years. She said the counties work well together regionally and

The Florida Legislature is required to redraw the state's congressional districts to match those identified in the 2010 federal census — a once-a-decade process called redistricting to keep the same number of people to assure equal representation in Congress.

TOPIC: REDISTRICTING

The existing 13th Congressional District, which includes all of Sarasota and most of Manatee, would change because it has grown to include 61,000 more people than the 696,000 allowed

Just last month, the Florida Senate proposed maps that kept almost all of Sarasota in the 12th Congressional District. The reason why the changes prompted the changes is unclear. State Sens. Nancy Detert, R-Venice, and Mike Harlan, R-Manatee, played no role in changing the boundary lines and did not know the changes were coming.

One factor could have been Charlotte County, which lobbied against the previous map. They would have put Charlotte in the Lakeland-based 12th Congressional District. Instead, they decided to keep it as is. They should be combined with a coastal community like Sarasota.

The new map easily passed the Florida Senate Tuesday. The House has proposed a different congressional district, but does not split off Lakewood Ranch or east Sarasota. The two chambers will ultimately have to agree on a single map.

The Senate would bind coastal parts of Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties into the 12th Congressional District, now represented by Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Longboat Key.

About 90,000 people living east of I-75 — including Lakewood Ranch, Parrish, and Venice — would be in the 12th District, covering 11 counties. Rep. Dennis Ross, R-Lakeland, now represents the district.

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3 COMMENTS



EARL WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2012 AT 9:17 PM

I hope someone picks up on how this is all about Weatherford screwing Buchanan for the Governorship...
Just stating the obvious - Buchanan is even less loved in Tallahassee than Sarasota.



JAN SCHNEIDER THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2012 AT 1:18 AM

As a partisan, I cannot help but be pleased that the redistricting map just passed by the Florida Senate appears to make certain federal and state districts in the Southwest Florida area more Democratic. From the perspective of a citizen and a lawyer, however, I am distressed that the proposed plan seems to disregard basic requirements of Amendments 5 and 6 overwhelmingly passed by Florida voters and is consequently undemocratic. Surely the Florida legislature can come up with a plan that more faithfully adheres to the goals of fair districting. There is nothing more fundamental to representative democracy.



ROBIN 'ROBLIMO' MILLER THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2012 AT 2:46 AM

This is contrary to the intent of the redistricting amendment we voters said we wanted by more than a 60% margin. We need compact, competitive districts, not to make 13 as crazy as 11 instead of making 13 be "the" Sarasota and Manatee Congressional district. When you hear a Republican talk about voter fraud, remind it that this redistricting scam is pretty fraudulent, and tell it to tell its representatives that this is Bad Business.

House panel narrows Florida redistricting maps - Florida Wires

Posted on Friday, 01.20.12

Posted on Friday, 01.20.12

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- The Florida House Redistricting Committee has narrowed its choices to one map each for its own chamber and Congress.

The panel reached consensus on the maps Friday. It will meet again next week to consider amendments to and vote on plans for the 120-seat House, 40-seat Senate and Florida's 27 congressional seats.

The full Senate on Tuesday passed maps for itself and Congress.

Leaders in both chambers have agreed to work from the map the other has drawn for itself.

The congressional maps add two new districts because of population gains between 2000 and 2010.

Critics say the Senate's plans violate a pair of anti-gerrymandering amendments voters put in the Florida Constitution in 2010.

Both passed with bi-partisan majorities.

House panel narrows Florida redistricting maps

By The Associated Press

Published: January 20, 2012

Updated: January 20, 2012 - 1:16 PM

TALLAHASSEE --

The Florida House Redistricting Committee has narrowed its choices to one map each for its own chamber and Congress.

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Florida redistricting would lump two Pinellas cities with Hillsborough voters

Two Pinellas County cities are bucking a state legislative redistricting proposal that puts their entire communities in a predominantly Hillsborough County district.

The governing bodies of both Safety Harbor and Oldsmar adopted resolutions this week against proposals that would make them part of House District 64. They're concerned that their communities won't be properly represented.

"We have more in common with Pinellas County than Hillsborough and our concern is we wouldn't be fairly represented," said Oldsmar Mayor Jim Ronecker,

Safety Harbor Mayor Andy Steingold, who called a special city meeting to discuss the matter on Thursday, said the communities, which each have their own special identities, need a representative who's familiar with Pinellas.

"I don't know how one state House representative from a predominantly Hillsborough County district could effectively represent the needs of Pinellas communities that are even diverse from each other," Steingold said.

State Rep. Ed Hooper, R-Clearwater, isn't happy, either.

"I represent the majority of Safety Harbor and I wanted to get the rest of it, not lose it all," said Hooper, who is the District 50 representative.

A portion of unincorporated East Lake east of East Lake Road also would be in the new District 64.

Oldsmar is in current House District 48, represented by state Rep. Peter Nehr. Northern Safety Harbor is also in that district.

The new redistricting effort comes after the 2010 census and is complicated this time by voter-approved Fair Districts constitutional amendments, which prohibit lawmakers from protecting incumbents and political parties and require them to protect minority voting strength and keep county and city boundaries intact whenever possible.

The aim is to divide the state's 18.8 million residents into 120 House districts, 40 Senate districts and 27 congressional districts.

Hooper said he understands it won't be easy to tweak new maps to satisfy two cities. The ideal population for each House district is a little under 157,000, so moving one line could create a domino effect, he said.

Both cities have sent copies of their resolutions and letters of opposition to Pinellas County's legislative delegation and to the House's redistricting committee. But city officials won't know if their opposition will make a difference until at least next week.

The state Senate approved new maps on Tuesday. The House Redistricting Committee met on Friday. It accepted the Senate's map and narrowed down proposals for redrawing state House seats and congressional seats, said Ryan Duffy, House spokesman.

Oldsmar and Safety Harbor's concern didn't come up in committee discussion. The committee is expected to vote on the new maps next week. A vote by the full House will take place after that, but no specific date has been set, Duffy said.

Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau writer Mary Ellen Klas contributed to this report. Lorri Helfand can be reached at lorri@tampabay.com or (727) 445-4155. Go to tampabay.com/letters to write a letter to the editor.



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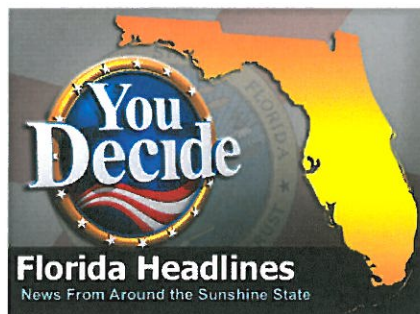
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House panel narrows Florida redistricting maps

Updated: Friday, 20 Jan 2012, 8:16 PM EST
Published: Friday, 20 Jan 2012, 8:16 PM EST

BILL KACZOR, Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) - A Democratic lawmaker suggested the creation of a couple of black-Hispanic "coalition" Senate districts and other changes affecting minority representation as the House Redistricting Committee took another step toward finalizing Florida's legislative and congressional maps Friday.

The panel narrowed its proposals to one map each for its own chamber and congressional districts. House and Senate redistricting leaders have agreed to work off the map each chamber draws for itself. The Senate passed its maps Tuesday.

Republicans currently hold overwhelming majorities in the Legislature and congressional delegation. The new maps are expected to keep the GOP in charge although Democrats could pick up some seats.

Rep. Mack Bernard, D-West Palm Beach, suggested the "coalition" districts. He said he may offer amendments to the Senate and congressional maps that could improve the Democrats' chances. His idea is to shift some black Democrats out of majority-minority districts to make those surrounding them more competitive.

The committee will meet again next Friday to consider changes and finalize the maps before they go to the full House the following week.

Committee Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, encouraged Bernard to put his ideas in writing but said he's confident the current proposals conform to a pair of new constitutional amendments that require lawmakers to protect minority voting representation.

"Florida is a diverse state," Weatherford said. "Our maps should reflect that diversity and we think that our maps this year absolutely do that."

Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich of Weston offered proposals similar Bernard's in committee last week but withdrew them amid criticism she had waited too late in the process.

Rich and other critics say the Senate's maps would continue to "pack" Democratic-voting minorities into a handful of districts, which gives the GOP a better chance of winning neighboring seats. She also argued the Senate proposals violated the Fair Districts amendments that also include a ban on intentionally favoring incumbents or political parties.

Senate Republicans disputed those allegations and the maps passed with bi-partisan majorities.

Rich conceded her proposals weren't exactly what she had hoped for and that the courts will ultimately determine if the Legislature's maps are constitutional.

Bernard said he hasn't discussed his ideas with Rich.

"This is just me thinking of the best way to keep the districts as compact as possible," he said.

Staff director Alex Kelly said committee staffers attempted what Bernard is proposing for the congressional map and found it would cut voting age blacks from 55.73 percent of the 24th District to just under 50 percent.

The plan also renumbers the districts so the 24th would replace the current 17th district seat held by U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson, D-Miami Gardens.

The reduced percentage of blacks still would be enough for them to elect the candidate of their choice, Bernard said.

He also wants to make a pair of black-majority Senate districts in South Florida more compact and in the process create two neighboring coalition districts. Blacks and Hispanics would outnumber non-Hispanic whites but neither would have a majority by itself.

Getting the two groups to agree on a candidate may be problematic for a coalition district Bernard envisions for Miami-Dade, though, because it would pair Republican-leaning Cuban-Americans with black Democrats and other Hispanics. A Palm Beach County coalition district likely would favor a Democrat because it would match predominantly non-Cuban Hispanics with blacks, Bernard said.

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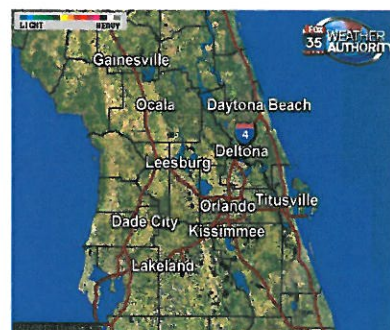


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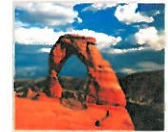
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Florida House panel moves toward approving redistricting maps

TALLAHASSEE - The House Redistricting Committee began narrowing its options for redrawing the state's political boundaries, even as the chairman of the panel indicated it was unlikely that the full House would take up the politically volatile issue before the end of the month.

At a meeting today, the committee decided to focus on the congressional plan in HB 6005 and the House plan in HJR 6011 -- options that would largely preserve the GOP's dominant edge in Florida's politics, if slightly diminished.

Of the 120 House seats under the new plan, 73 would have gone for Gov. Rick Scott in 2010 over then-CFO Alex Sink, Scott's Democratic opponent. Sink would have won 47. Scott defeated Sink in one of the closest Florida gubernatorial elections in modern history.

In the congressional delegation, Republican U.S. Sen. John McCain of Arizona would have carried 16 seats in the 2008 presidential election; President Barack Obama would have won 11. McCain lost Florida overall.

Democrats, though, largely held their fire at

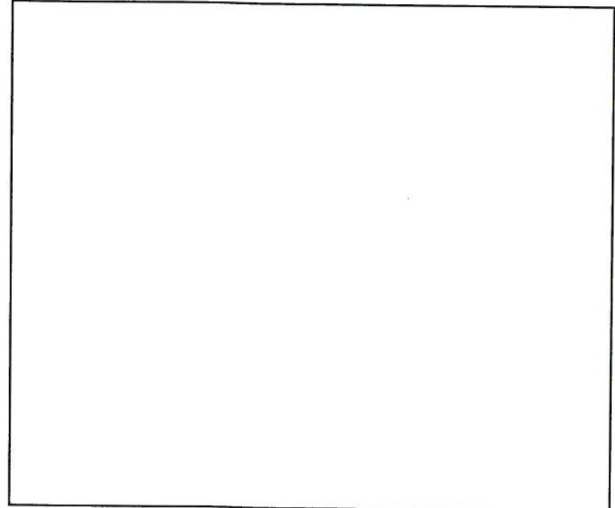
the meeting -- following a longstanding pattern of largely watching the Republican Party carry out the redistricting process. Rep. Mack Bernard, D-West Palm Beach, made a few suggestions that he said might become amendments by next Friday, when the committee plans to approve its final draft of the maps.

One of Bernard's ideas, if it were adopted, could derail the redistricting process.

Bernard recommended reconfiguring several Senate districts in Southeast Florida, a move Bernard said would strengthen minorities in the area and bring that portion of the map in line with the anti-gerrymandering Fair Districts amendments approved by voters last year.

"Basically, looking at it, it just seems to me that they would be more compact, and in Palm Beach and in Broward, those minorities would get to elect a representative of their choice," Bernard said.

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Any amendment to the Senate map would face long odds, given that Senate Reapportionment Chairman Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, has suggested that would prompt the upper chamber to draw its own House maps. House and Senate leaders have a gentlemen's agreement to essentially accept each other's maps for their respective chambers.

Florida Supreme Court has to sign off on the legislative plans, but all three are expected to be challenged in court even after that.

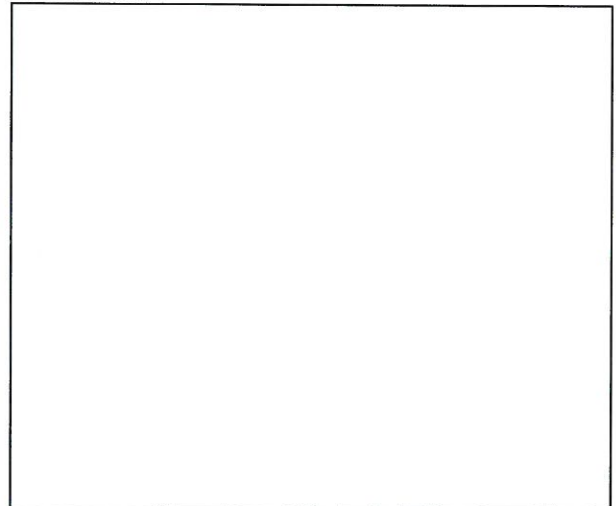
The distinctions among the maps the committee reviewed Friday were often relatively minor and focused in a few corners of the state. The final decision on a House map, for example, was based on the fact that Tallahassee would be split two ways under the map that was selected and three ways in another map under consideration.

House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said the full House would likely take up the maps Feb. 2. That puts the timeline behind the Senate, which approved its redistricting plans earlier in the week, and well behind the schedule voting rights groups like the League of Women Voters had asked the Legislature to follow.

"We are moving as quickly as we can," Weatherford said, "but not to the detriment of the public or the membership."

Any differences on the congressional maps would still have to be hammered out with the Senate even if the legislative maps are swapped without a disruption. The congressional maps still have to be approved by Gov. Rick Scott and the

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Florida redistricting would lump two Pinellas cities with Hillsborough voters

Two Pinellas County cities are bucking a state legislative redistricting proposal that puts their entire communities in a predominantly Hillsborough County district.

The governing bodies of both Safety Harbor and Oldsmar adopted resolutions this week against proposals that would make them part of House District 64. They're concerned that their communities won't be properly represented.

"We have more in common with Pinellas County than Hillsborough and our concern is we wouldn't be fairly represented," said Oldsmar Mayor Jim Ronecker,

Safety Harbor Mayor Andy Steingold, who called a special city meeting to discuss the matter on Thursday, said the communities, which each have their own special identities, need a representative who's familiar with Pinellas.

"I don't know how one state House representative from a predominantly Hillsborough County district could effectively represent the needs of Pinellas communities that are even diverse from each other," Steingold said.

State Rep. Ed Hooper, R-Clearwater, isn't happy, either.

"I represent the majority of Safety Harbor and I wanted to get the rest of it, not lose it all," said Hooper, who is the District 50 representative.

A portion of unincorporated East Lake east of East Lake Road also would be in the new District 64.

Oldsmar is in current House District 48, represented by state Rep. Peter Nehr. Northern Safety Harbor is also in that district.

The new redistricting effort comes after the 2010 census and is complicated this time by voter-approved Fair Districts constitutional amendments, which prohibit lawmakers from protecting incumbents and political parties and require them to protect minority voting strength and keep county and city boundaries intact whenever possible.

The aim is to divide the state's 18.8 million residents into 120 House districts, 40 Senate districts and 27 congressional districts.

Hooper said he understands it won't be easy to tweak new maps to satisfy two cities. The ideal population for each House district is a little under 157,000, so moving one line could create a domino effect, he said.

Both cities have sent copies of their resolutions and letters of opposition to Pinellas County's legislative delegation and to the House's redistricting committee. But city officials won't know if their opposition will make a difference until at least next week.

The state Senate approved new maps on Tuesday. The House Redistricting Committee met on Friday. It accepted the Senate's map and narrowed down proposals for redrawing state House seats and congressional seats, said Ryan Duffy, House spokesman.

Oldsmar and Safety Harbor's concern didn't come up in committee discussion. The committee is expected to vote on the new maps next week. A vote by the full House will take place after that, but no specific date has been set, Duffy said.

Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau writer Mary Ellen Klas contributed to this report. Lorri Helfand can be reached at lorri@tampabay.com or (727) 445-4155. Go to tampabay.com/letters to write a letter to the editor.



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Have Your Say on Redistricting

Posted on January 14th, 2012 in [Old Northeast-Downtown St. Petersburg](#)

The House's redistricting subcommittees narrowed their options for redistricting to the bills listed below (3 State House, 3 congressional, and 1 State Senate).

On Jan. 20 and Jan. 27, the House Redistricting Committee will hold workshops in Tallahassee to select and approve a State House map, a State Senate map, and a congressional map.

The maps and additional information regarding the bills can be viewed at at <http://myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Redistricting/Redistricting2012.aspx>.

There are many ways to provide your input regarding the House's options for redistricting:

1. Send an email to mydistrictbuilder@myfloridahouse.gov
2. Post comments via Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/MyDistrictBuilder>
3. Send a Tweet to [@FLRedistricting](#)
4. Blog on the Public Input page at <http://mydistrictbuilderplanexplorer.wordpress.com/>
5. Use MyDistrictBuilder to illustrate your suggestions
6. Send a letter or postcard to Redistricting Committee, 400 House Office Building, 402 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399
7. Communicate via your legislators
8. Come speak at the January 20 workshop in Tallahassee

HJR 6001 – PCB SRS 12-01 – by Representative Nehr – State Senate Map S000S9004

HB 6003 - PCB CRS 12-05 – by Representative Legg – Congressional Map H000C9041

HB 6005 – PCB CRS 12-06 – by Representative Legg – Congressional Map H000C9043

HB 6007 - PCB CRS 12-07 – by Representative Legg – Congressional Map H000C9045

- **HJR 6009 – PCB HRS 12-01 – by Representative Schenck – State House Map H000H9025**
- **HJR 6011 – PCB HRS 12-02 – by Representative Schenck – State House Map H000H9027**
- **HJR 6013 – PCB HRS 12-05 – by Representative Schenck – State House Map H000H9031**

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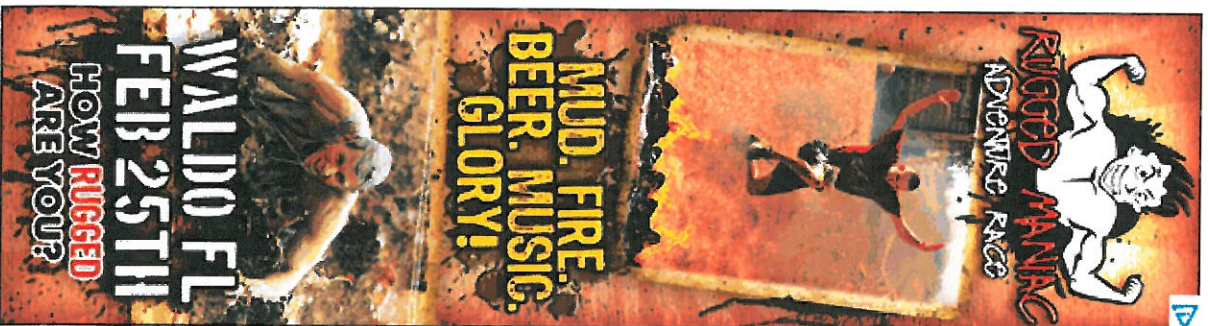
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Weatherford offers to carry LWV amendments — if they show up to talk – Central Florida Political Pulse – Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — House Speaker-designate **Will Weatherford** has sent a letter to the League of Women Voters offering to introduce their amendments to new House-Senate redistricting maps the Legislature is rushing to pass.

There's just one catch: they have to show up to explain them.

Republican lawmakers have been bashing the League for months because it backed the Fair Districts anti-gerrymandering reforms in 2010 then didn't offer any alternative maps until the start of session this month — two months after the deadline for public map submissions.

This week, the League made a new submission — “nested” maps where House districts would be entirely contained within the boundaries of Senate districts, which could clean up the overlaying lines a bit and help clarify to voters which seats they're in. In an open letter, the League asked Republican lawmakers or Democrats to introduce the maps before today's noon deadline and take them up in the House committee voting on the maps Friday.

An aide to House Speaker **Dean Cannon** said Weatherford replied he would introduce the maps, if they attend the meeting Friday to defend them.

No response from the League yet — other than to acknowledge the letter.

Weatherford has also filed a new congressional plan that bridges the difference with the Senate over how to draw 27 new U.S. House seats. That plan will get taken up Friday, and both chambers hope to pass both maps by the end of next week.

Redistricting plan joins Manatee, Sarasota - Elections

By SARA KENNEDY

MANATEE -- A plan in which most of Manatee and Sarasota counties are joined together in a single congressional district may have the inside track when it comes to redistricting.

State Rep. Doug Holder, R-Sarasota, co-chair of the Florida House Congressional Redistricting Subcommittee, believes a proposal that keeps the two counties together in a newly formed 16th Congressional District will prevail in the Florida Legislature.

"What we're looking at is a House proposal that shows Sarasota and Manatee together for the congressional districts' map we're working on at this point," Holder said Wednesday.

A recently approved Senate version bifurcated both counties, lumping their easternmost parts into a monster inland district.

"I don't have very much confidence the Senate map will be utilized," Holder said.

The Florida Legislature is attempting to ensure newly drawn congressional districts have about the same number of voters, based on results of the 2010 census. How the boundaries are drawn can influence who gets elected, and whether local jurisdictions gain or lose political clout.

U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Sarasota, called the House proposal under consideration Wednesday the "Sweet 16" in a press release from his office.

"The two counties are so tightly interwoven, geographically and economically, that it was in the best interest of the people to keep them in the same district," said Buchanan, who currently represents the 13th Congressional District.

The 13th encompasses most of Manatee, all of Sarasota, DeSoto and Hardee counties, and a small slice of Charlotte County.

Public testimony also stressed the importance of keeping the two counties in the same district; and the map also conforms with guidelines under a new state constitutional amendment, which emphasized compact and contiguous districts, according to Buchanan's office.

"Vern's positive," said campaign spokeswoman Sally Tibbetts. "All along, he has maintained Sarasota and Manatee counties should stay together -- they are one economic region. He's pleased this map does that."

The plan is expected to be approved Friday by a key House committee, and then quickly ratified by the state Senate, the release from Buchanan's office said.

The Senate version bifurcating the two counties is "inappropriate," and would "disenfranchise" the Lakewood Ranch community, agreed Manatee County Democratic Chairman Richard O'Brien.

"It's inappropriate because it disenfranchises the Lakewood Ranch community, which is traditionally part of Sarasota and Manatee counties in every way -- politically, historically and culturally," said O'Brien.

State Rep. Greg Steube, R-Bradenton, plans to support the House version, saying, "I think it definitely would not be as productive as if we had Manatee and Sarasota counties together.

"It makes a more compact, geographically sound district," he added.

Sara Kennedy, Herald reporter, can be reached at 941-745-7031.



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Redistricting South Florida: Broward, Palm to lose capital clout because of redistricting

By Aaron Deslatte, Tallahassee Bureau Chief 5:53 a.m. EST, January 25, 2012

TALLAHASSEE — South Florida stands to lose some clout in the Republican-dominated state Capitol under proposed legislative maps steaming toward passage in the once-a-decade redistricting process in [Tallahassee](#).

Blame it on the population currents that steered people to points north and west during the past decade -- and the Fair Districts reforms that direct lawmakers to protect minority seats and scramble current district boundaries to cut fewer counties and cities into pieces.

Because other parts of the state have grown faster, the maps for House and [Senate](#) seats slated to get their first committee votes Friday would see Broward and [Palm Beach](#) go from holding all or parts of 25 seats in the Florida House to only 23 seats. Two that were drawn a decade ago to reach from Naples all the way to parts of southern Broward would now stay on the west coast.

Both those seats are held by [Republicans](#) — House Health Care budget chief Matt Hudson, R-Naples, and Rep. Jeanette Nuñez, R-Miami.

A handful of [House Democrats](#) have also been drawn into the same seats, meaning they'll have to run against each other in a primary, or find another office to seek.

"You can imagine those types of conversations have to take place for members not to be at each other's throats," said House Democratic Leader-designate Perry Thurston, a [Plantation](#) lawyer who would live in the same proposed district as Rep. Elaine Schwartz, D-[Hollywood](#).

"Those discussions are definitely being had."

Overall, more South Florida districts would resemble square and rectangular shapes as opposed to their current jigsaw-puzzle appearance.

They will keep their current overwhelmingly Democratic tilt.

Of the current 25 House districts, 18 have a Democratic voter edge. A Sun Sentinel analysis shows the proposed maps would retain 18 Democratic seats, without cutting apart as many cities to do so.

Broward and Palm Beach would also go from 10 Senate seats to eight, and only one -- stretching from coastal Palm Beach to Indian River counties -- would be a safe GOP seat. The counties now have two Republican senators.

The new District 29, which occupies much of the coastal Broward district of Sen. [Ellyn Bogdanoff](#), R-[Fort Lauderdale](#), would appear to be a swing district with a 49-percent Republican to 47-percent Democratic split. Voters there went narrowly for Democrat [Alex Sink](#) in the 2010 governor's race and for Republican [John McCain](#) in the 2008 presidential contest.

[Palm Beach County](#) would lose a gerrymandered Senate seat currently held by Senate Economic Development budget chair Lizabeth Benacquisto, R-[Wellington](#), whose seat will be moved entirely to southwest Florida.

The second lost Senate district is one that currently stretches from western Palm Beach and Broward counties to [Key West](#) and is held by Sen. [Larcenia Bullard](#), D-[Miami](#). It would be contained in Miami-Dade, Monroe, Collier and Hendry counties.

Democrats so far haven't been thrilled with the result.

Besides Thurston and Schwartz, Reps. Evan Jenne, D-[Dania Beach](#), and Joe Gibbons, D-[Hallandale Beach](#), are both drawn into one district, although Jenne is eyeing a run for [Broward County](#) Commission.

So are Rep. Mark Pafford, D-West Palm Beach, and Rep. Joseph Abruzzo, D-[Wellington](#), who is now eyeing a new Senate district.

And further south, Reps. Daphne Campbell, D-Miami, John Patrick Julien, D-North Miami Beach, and Barbara Watson, D-Miami Gardens, are all drawn into one district.

While a number of lawmakers are miffed about their districts, there isn't likely to be a lot of public debate about the subject because Amendments 5 and 6 preclude the Legislature from drawing maps that intentionally help or hurt incumbents or political parties.

Those issues are likely to get more of an airing in the legal fights that will inevitably ensue once the Legislature finishes its map-drawing, sometime before March 9.

"You can't flip out over a map that you see today. It will not be the final map," said Pafford, who plans to run for the new District 86 which takes in all of Loxahatchee Groves, Haverhill, Royal Palm Beach and [Wellington](#).

"If you're a Democrat in Palm Beach, there will be Democratic seats," he said. "It's the bigger picture everybody needs to be concerned about: Are they drawing districts without the intent of helping those who are in them?"

Rep. Mack Bernard, D-[West Palm Beach](#), suggested last week re-drawing the new Senate districts to keep them entirely in Broward, Miami-Dade or Palm Beach and make them more compact without diminishing minority voting rights.

In response, House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said he "welcomed" amendments this week, but that he's confident the current product will hold up under legal scrutiny.

"There are nuances to the map-making process, but that's going to be for the courts to decide," Weatherford said.

The Florida League of Women Voters also asked Democrats to offer substitute maps Friday that would "nest" three House districts entirely within each Senate district – and thus be more compact and easier for voters to keep straight. But it's unclear if they will offer any alternatives.

"It's very difficult drawing maps for House seats because there are so many of them, and when you change one you have to change six others," said current House Minority Leader Ron Saunders, D-Key West.


"It's hard to keep cities whole in Broward. The municipalities aren't even drawn compactly. There's a lot of competing goals."

adeslatte@tribune.com or 850-222-5564.



Weatherford accuses redistricting advocacy groups of ‘political and legal stunt’

By [Ashley Lopez](#) | 01.27.12 | 10:36 am

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During a vote in a state House redistricting committee, a coalition of advocacy groups has declined to defend the maps they recently submitted. Leaders called the move “disappointing” and a “political and legal stunt.”

House redistricting chair state Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said today that he has submitted an amendment on behalf of the Florida League of Women Voters, Common Cause and National Council of La Raza. However, the groups have declined to appear before the committee and defend their proposals.

Throughout the process of redistricting, the coalition has [accused legislators of favoring incumbents and ignoring public input](#). Weatherford said today that he “submitted their maps as a courtesy,” adding that it was also a way of addressing the coalition’s criticisms and allowing everyone to have a voice in the process. However, the groups [sent in a letter today](#) (.pdf) in place of an appearance (via *Orlando Sentinel*).



State Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel (Pic by Mark Foley, via myfloridahouse.gov)

Weatherford said it was “uncustomary for the chair to submit an amendment,” but that he felt it would be the right thing to do since the groups “traveled around the state” to discuss the maps.

“I thought it would be perfectly appropriate for them to submit maps,” Weatherford said. “We have worked extremely hard to make this a ‘no surprises’ process. I have to say, I am a little bit disappointed that the League has decided not to speak.”

The League had a lobbyist in the audience, however, who he declined to address the committee.

Due to the absence, the committee took the opportunity to express frustration with the way events transpired. Weatherford said that the “citizens of Florida deserve a lot better than a 12-page letter.” He said he believes that the groups maneuver “is an unfortunate political and legal stunt.”

State Rep. Chris Dorworth, R-Heathrow, said he found it frustrating that the groups accused them of not being transparent — yet only gave the committee “60 hours” to consider their maps.

Staff and committee members criticized the maps and said that the League, Common Cause and La Raza submitted plans that favored incumbents. The committee staff’s analysis also said that there was less compactness in the coalition’s maps versus the committee maps. Staff compared Southwest Florida and Duval maps, among other regions. There were also allegations that the coalition’s maps would violate the Voting Rights Act.

A staff member presenting the coalition’s maps said that if the committee would have drawn those maps, they “would have been excoriated.”

In the letter to the committee, the groups opened by mentioning that they received their invitation “late in the evening of January 24, 2012,” less than three days before they would have to appear.

Weatherford closed the presentation of his amendment by saying he was not expecting that “the January surprise” would come from the very group that was accusing them of not being transparent. The entire committee eventually voted down the amendment.

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Information & News from TCPalm.com (Stuart, FL)

Jan 27, 12:35 PM EST

House panel approves Florida redistricting plans

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) -- A Florida House committee has approved redistricting plans for legislative and congressional seats on party line votes - Republicans for and Democrats against.

The Redistricting Committee's votes on Friday set the stage for floor action next week.

Three groups that are part of the Fair Districts coalition charged the maps favor the GOP although Florida is split almost evenly between the two major parties.

Fair Districts spearheaded the adoption of two anti-gerrymandering amendments to the Florida Constitution by voters in 2010.

Republicans control both legislative chambers and have an overwhelming majority in the state's congressional delegation.

The panel, though, considered but unanimously rejected maps submitted by the Fair District groups.

Those groups are the Florida League of Women Voters, National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida.

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Fair Districts lambasts legislative maps, details alleged legal violations

The Fair Districts coalition broke its silence on the legislature's [nearly completed redistricting maps](#) late Thursday and delivered a 12-page letter to lawmakers lambasting their proposals for manipulating the political boundaries for partisan and incumbent advantage, in violation of the state Constitution.

"It appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents," the group wrote in its letter to House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford**. "The Legislature's refusal to follow this efficient and logical redistricting method proves that it wanted to retain its ability to surreptitiously favor a party or incumbents, and the numbers bear this out."

In short, the group which helped bring new state's redistricting standards to the state Constitution, accuses lawmakers of not only strategically protecting incumbents with the drawing of districts but doing it to strengthen weak districts, pick favorites in competitive areas, pack minority voters into districts and strategically secure a Republican majority for the next decade.

Each of those tactics is implicitly prohibited in the constitution under the new Fair District amendments 5 and 6, the group claims.

"Neither map reflects the true partisan performance of Floridians," the coalition said, and "would still cement a severe partisan imbalance."

As an alternative, the coalition has offered maps for Congress, the Senate and the House districts by nesting "House Districts within Senate Districts so that not a single House seat breaks a single Senate line. This "nesting" gives voters the advantage of having a more efficient and logical form of representation with a dedicated delegation that can work together to serve the needs of Florida's communities," the letter states. "In our maps, there is a ratio of three House districts to every Senate district."

Weatherford will offer the House and congressional maps when the committee meets this morning. He had asked the group to provide the committee to appear in the Redistricting Committee to explain their methodology for drawing their proposed House, Senate and congressional maps but chose to send the letter instead. Their alternative maps are expected to be soundly defeated.

The House is expected to vote out its maps next week, followed by a vote of approval by the Senate. The attorney general will then send the legislative maps to the Florida Supreme Court for the required 30-day review and the congressional map will go to the governor for his signature.

The coalition, which includes the League of Women Voters, the National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida had offered little detail about their objections to the redistricting plans, except that they believed they were not compliant with the new redistricting standards. Its letter reads like a summary of its legal argument in the court proceeding. [Download Ltr to Weatherford1-26-12](#)

Here is the letter Weatherford sent to the coalition: [Download Letter from Weatherford to LWV](#)

Here are some highlights:

Congress:

* Legislators manipulated the boundary lines to strengthen the districts of incumbents in weaker seats. For example, the newly drawn congressional District 27 "was used as a way to remove high-performing Democratic areas from vulnerable incumbent Republicans' districts, thereby making their seats safer." The group said the districts of Republican Dan Webster of Orlando

* The group commends the House for attempt to "comply with the amendment's prohibition on political favoritism to a greater degree than did the Congressional or Senate map" but says the House's proposed map "would still cement a severe partisan imbalance."

* On average, each Senate district is comprised of parts of 7.325 House districts. The Senate's proposed minority Districts 19 and 34 are each comprised of no less than 12 House Districts. No Senate District has less than 4 House districts and eight Senate districts have 10 or more House districts.

* In the congressional map, District 27 "was used as a way to remove high-performing Democratic areas from vulnerable incumbent Republicans' districts, thereby making their seats safer." The group alleges that both maps benefit Republican Dan Webster's district. For example, "Republican Daniel Webster's district had performed Democratic in recent presidential and gubernatorial elections, but after pulling his district's Democratic voters into the new District 27, Webster's proposed new district performs over 50% Republican."

* Republican U.S. Rep. Sandy Adams "had previously represented a vulnerable Republican district. Her new district excludes the significantly Democratic voters she currently represents, thereby increasing the Republican lean in her new district. Republican Dennis Ross's new District 12 shed a group of Democratic voters by giving them to the new District 27, making his new District 15 "approximately two points safer than his old District."

* And Republican U.S. Rep. Bill Posey, of Congressional District 15, "was able to shed Democratic voters into the new District 27 and now has a safely Republican seat."

* The House's congressional map was also able to "improve the Republican performance of Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's district by about 1.5%, thereby reducing her vulnerability. In recent elections, Ros-Lehtinen's district that had been trending increasingly Democratic."

* The group also criticized the way lawmakers handled minority districts. For example, in District 21, Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart "received more Republican voters to make his seat safer by about two points." Under the House's proposed map, Diaz-Balart's will run in District 25, a district that votes solidly Republican.

* Under the House's map, the group alleges that at least 16 of the 25 incumbents will run in safely Democratic or Republican districts in 2012.

* The Senate and House proposals "both have 14 safe Republican seats and only 7 safe Democratic seats. If candidates run good campaigns, connect with the voters and turn out the vote, either party should be able to claim a majority of Florida's Congressional delegation. Under almost any calculation, the Senate will be 2 to 1 Republican. This proposed map is even more firmly skewed than the 2002 map."

* The Coalition Map was drawn "without regard to political party control. This is evidenced by the fact that the Coalition Map nests its House districts within its Senate districts. This has the effect of making it easier for voters to know who their representatives are, and provides a more efficient and logical form of representation.

* Some districts were clearly designed "to help shore up vulnerable Republican incumbents or to create seats for Republican state legislators planning to run for higher office....73% of the existing constituents are kept in the same districts under the Senate's proposed Congressional map."

Redistricting deal nears end, drawing at least 38 incumbent House members into the same districts | Florida politics blog: The Buzz

At least 38 sitting House members would be forced into a face off with one of their colleagues -- or move out of their current districts -- a record-breaking shakeup in incumbency, if the House Redistricting Committee votes out its maps for the House, Senate and Congress as expected on Friday.

The legislative musical chairs was started when voters approved Amendments 5 and 6, forcing lawmakers to ignore incumbent and political parties and draw districts according to political boundary lines, when possible, and in a way that protects minority voting strength.

The result pits Democrats against Democrats, one Republicans against a Democrat and, most unexpectedly, Republicans against Republicans in the chamber in which a super majority controls that party.

If the House committee passes the three maps as expected, they will then be brought to the House floor on Thursday, sent back to the Senate as early as Friday and then the legislative maps would be sent to the Florida Supreme Court for the required 30-day review.

"We're will neither accelerate or delay them," said House Speaker **Dean Cannon**, R-Winter Park, on Thursday. But, he added, they appeared to be moving at a steady pace to finish soon.

Democratic Leader **Ron Saunders** of Key West told the Herald/Times his caucus is willing to let them finish up next week and get the issue before the court.

Democratic Leader **Ron Saunders** of Key West told the Herald/Times his caucus is willing to limit debate and finish up next week in order to get the issue before the court. Diaz Balart, if re-elected, would be the sitting congressman for Rivera, another Miami Republican, and would be the hometown congressman for Democrat U.S. **Rep. Alcee Hastings**, according to a Herald/Times analysis.

A proposed amendment, drafted by the House staff and expected to be adopted at Friday's four-hour hearing, also tinkers with the Central Florida of U.S. Reps. **Richard Nugent** and **Cliff Stearns**, merging the two Republicans into a single central Florida district, District 7.

U.S. Reps. **Sandy Adams** and **John Mica**, both Orlando Republicans, would also live in the proposed District 7, although either of them could seek the more Democrat-heavy seat to the east, District 6. And U.S. Rep. Dan Webster of Ocoee would be represented by the meandering minority majority district held by Democrat Corrine Brown.

The House committee is expected to pass the Senate map with no changes. The Senate map pits no incumbents against each other, so that leaves the most dramatic battle lines drawn for the House. There, amendments proposed by the House redistricting maps to be taken up on Friday will include a House map that pushes 38 incumbents into districts with other legislators and increases the odds of Democrats winning nine to 11 additional seats, according to a Herald/Times analysis.

All the maps appear to be a done deal. Senate Redistricting chairman Don Gaetz told the Herald/Times this week he expected the House to make slight changes to its map and that the Senate "hoped to accept those changes" in time to get the maps on a fast track to court approval.

The congressional map also includes the newly created Hispanic-opportunity seat based in Central Florida, District 9 and the new Republican-dominated District 3 in North Central Florida, in which state Sen. Steve Oelrich has already announced his candidacy.

The most significant change to the amendment to the House map would shift the districts of Jacksonville Republican Dan Davis, Michael Weinstein and Charles McBurney. Instead of pitting Davis and McBurney against each other, it pits McBurney and Weinstein into the same district. Weinstein told the Jacksonville Times Union he is considering running for the Senate seat being vacated by Sen. Steve Wise instead. Former Rep. Aaron Bean has already announced his candidacy for that post.

Here are the proposed match-ups by district and member in the House map -- if the amendment is accepted:

D16 – Charles McBurney, R-Jacksonville, and Michael Weinstein, R-Jacksonville,

D 29 – Chris Dorworth, R-Heathrow, and Scott Plakon, R-Longwood

D 40 – Seth McKeel, R-Lakeland and Kelli Stargel, R-Lakeland

D 44 – Eric Eisnagle, R-Orlando, and Geraldine Thompson, D-Windemere

D 51 – Steve Crisafulli, R-Merritt Island, and Tom Goodson, R-Rockledge

D 52 – John Tobia, R-Melbourne, and Ritch Workman, R-Melbourne

D 63 – James Grant, R-Tampa, and Shawn Harrison, R-Tampa

D 69 – Larry Ahern, R-St. Petersburg, and Jim Frishe, R-St. Petersburg, and Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg

D 72 – Doug Holder, R-Osprey, and Ray Pilon, R-Sarasota

D 86 – Joe Abruzzo, D-West Palm Beach and Mark Pafford, D-West Palm Beach

D 91 – Bill Hager, R-Boca Raton and Irv Slosberg, D-Boca Raton

D 99 – Elaine Schwartz, D-Hollywood, and Perry Thurston, D-Plantation

D 100 – Joe Gibbons, D-Hallandale Beach, and Evan Jenne, D-Dania Beach

D 107 – Daphne Campbell, D-Miami, John Patrick Julien, D-Miami Beach, Barbara Watson, D-Miami Gardens

D 110 – Eddy Gonzalez, R-Hialeah, and Jose Oliva, R-Miami Lakes

D 116 – Jose Felix Diaz, R-Miami, and Ana Rivas Logan, R-Miami

-- *Times researcher Darla Cameron contributed to this report*

Weatherford blasts no-show Fair Districts supporters, shoots down their maps | Florida Politics

TALLAHASSEE -- House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford** lambasted Fair Districts supporters Friday morning for proposing amendments to new legislative and congressional maps this week and not showing up to defend them.

Weatherford's committee today is slated to pass amendments offered by Rep. **Steve Precourt**, R-Orlando, to all three House, Senate and congressional maps and send them to floor.

But in an eleventh-hour bit of theater, the groups that helped push the Fair Districts anti-gerrymandering reforms in 2010 have introduced alternative maps and, in a 12-page letter sent Thursday night, argued its amendments were better because they include fewer city and county splits, as well as score higher in statistical analyses of compactness.

Further, they argue the ones Republicans are prepared to pass appear intended to help incumbents and the party in power.

"Although we have only had a day to analyze the Committee's latest Congressional and House maps, it appears that they, like previous submissions and like those passed by the Senate do not comply with the FairDistricts Amendments," reads the letter sent last night, signed by **Deirdre Macnab** with the League of Women Voters, **Eric Rodriguez** with La Raza and **Peter Butzin** with Common Cause of Florida.

"Specifically, it appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents."

But the move drew a firm rebuke from Weatherford, who offered the groups' amendments as a courtesy, and implored a Common Cause representative in the audience to defend the map. When he demurred, Weatherford was prepared to pounce.

"Frankly, I find it disappointing that anyone would suggest ... that [House maps] don't follow the letter of the law, and then refuse to stand before us and say why theirs does," Weatherford said, adding the maneuver was "an unfortunate political and more likely legal stunt."

Rep. **Eric Eisnaugle**, R-Orlando, also teed off on the groups for implying that the maps benefit incumbents when he is actually drawn into the same district as Precourt -- meaning the two will have to run against each other in a primary if they both want to come back next year.

"Frankly, you and I are drawn into the same district," Eisnaugle said to Precourt, complaining the letter "fails to even put it in a footnote."

House staff director **Alex Kelly** took issue with the implication in the groups' letter that lawmakers' House map appeared to be gerrymandered because it divides Reps. **Janet Adkins**, R-Fernandina Beach, and **Ronald Renuart**, R-Ponte Vedra Beach, into separate coastal House seats, noting the dividing line is a short distance from Renuart's home.

"What they fail to mention in the letter is that the division is the St. Johns-Duval counties line," Kelly told lawmakers. "What they also fail to mention is that in their own map they use the same line to divide districts."

The House's outside redistricting legal team -- Gray Robinson lawyer **George Meros** and former GOP legislator **Miguel De Grandy**-- also told the panel the LWV/La Raza/Common Cause maps would appear to make it harder to elect Hispanic and African-American lawmakers, and thus violate Amendments 5 and 6.

"A lot of people predicted there would be a January or February surprise when we put out our maps. Many members in this room thought these would not be the real maps," Weatherford said.

"Little did we know that we were going to stay the course and do what we said we were going to do ... but that the January surprise has come from the very groups that accused us of not following the intent of the law."

The committee then unanimously voted down the League's amendment for House and congressional

districts.

House panel approves Florida redistricting plans

Three groups that backed Florida's new anti-gerrymandering constitutional amendments say redistricting maps that cleared a House committee on Friday will perpetuate Republican legislative and congressional dominance in a state that's almost evenly divided between the two major parties.

House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, a Wesley Chapel Republican, denied the maps were drawn to favor the GOP and threw the allegation back at the Fair District coalition groups.

He said he was disappointed they would criticize the Legislature's maps yet refuse to appear before his committee to defend their own proposals, which the panel unanimously rejected before taking final action.

"It's a frankly unfortunate political, and more likely probably a legal, stunt," Weatherford said.

The committee approved its maps on party line votes, Republicans for and Democrats against.

"There's two things that make Tallahassee go around," said Democratic Rep. Evan Jenne of Dania Beach. "One is money and the other is partisanship, and this is 100 percent partisanship."

Floor debate will begin next Thursday with final action the following day, Weatherford said.

The Senate already has approved maps for its 40 districts and the state's 27 congressional seats. The panel accepted the Senate-passed map for its chamber. The Senate likewise intends to accept the House-drawn map for that chamber's 120 districts.

The committee also agreed to a proposed compromise on the congressional map. Weatherford said he's confident the Senate will accept it.

While the Florida League of Women Voters, National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida declined to testify, the Fair District advocates submitted an 11-page letter. It outlines their proposals and why they believe the Legislature's maps violate the two state constitutional amendment voters adopted in 2010.

Both Fair Districts amendments, one each covering the legislature and Congress, prohibit intentionally drawing districts to favor or disfavor incumbents or a political party. They also protect the rights of minorities to elect representatives of their choosing and require districts to be compact and use existing political and geographical boundaries where feasible.

The letter says the Legislature's maps "promise to perpetuate a system of one-party control in Florida in clear violation of the Florida Constitution." The Fair District groups also contend the maps miss the mark by protecting incumbents.

Republicans denied those allegations.

"I've never looked at political data on what the map does," Weatherford said. "I still couldn't tell you what the political implications are."

He also cited media reports indicating the committee's House map would place nearly a third of current members out of their existing districts or pair them against another incumbent.

The congressional compromise as well would displace a few incumbents from existing districts but unlike legislators, they are not required to live in their districts. The Senate map, though, does not double up or displace incumbents except for a couple who cannot seek re-election due to term limits.

The letter contends the House and Senate congressional maps each have 14 safe Republican seats and only seven safe Democratic seats. The rest are competitive but most also lean Republican, the groups say.

Republicans currently hold 19 congressional seats and Democrats only six. The new maps add two more seats to bring Florida's total to 27 because of population gains.

The groups predict the maps will enable Republicans to win two to three times as many congressional seats

as Democrats and twice as many seats in the state House and Senate.

They allege the maps continue to put large percentages of Democrats including minorities into a relatively small number of districts to give Republicans a better chance of winning the others although by narrower margins.

The groups' own proposals included a plan to "nest" three state House districts in each Senate district. Their maps also would have reduced the percentages of minorities in certain districts, notably one now held by U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, a black Democrat from Jacksonville. Blacks currently make up slightly less than 50 percent of the voting age population in Brown's district that snakes from Jacksonville to Orlando. The House map would increase that to 50.05 percent while the Fair Districts backers' plan would cut it to 35 percent.

The letter argues the lower percentage would be sufficient for a black to win a Democratic primary and then the general election in a Democratic-heavy district.

House lawyer George Meros told the panel that much of a reduction in black voting strength would violate both the Florida Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act.

Once lawmakers pass the plans, the legislative maps go to the Florida Supreme Court and the congressional plan to Gov. Rick Scott.

Then all the maps must obtain preclearance from the U.S. Justice Department or a federal court to determine if they comply with the Voting Rights Act.

Inside The Lines

House panel passes maps, blasts redistricting proposals by outside groups

The House Redistricting Committee approved blueprints for Florida's political future Friday, but not before taking aim at a set of amendments offered by a coalition of voting-rights groups including the League of Women Voters, reports Brandon Larrabee of the News Service of Florida.

Measures redefining the boundaries for the Legislature (HJR 6001, 6011) and Florida's 27 congressional seats (HB 6005) passed the panel on a series of party-line votes, bringing the House role in the once-a-decade redistricting process close to a conclusion.

But few think the process is likely to end with final House and Senate votes on the measures, expected by the end of next week. While Gov. Rick Scott seems likely to sign the congressional plan, the Florida Supreme Court must review the legislative plan — and both could be challenged under either the state's new anti-gerrymandering Fair Districts amendments or the federal Civil Rights Act.

"At the end of the day, somebody's going to sue," said Rep. Evan Jenne, D-Dania Beach.

Republicans said the maps represent a landmark in Florida politics as the first ones drawn under the new state standards, approved overwhelmingly by voters last November.

"There's not an ounce of political intent in these maps," said House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel.

On Friday, Democrats remained largely quiet, a continuation of their stance during a series of meetings on redistricting. The minority party never proposed their own maps — an acknowledgement, they said, of the realities of the process in the GOP-dominated chamber.

"This is 100 percent partisanship," Jenne said after the maps were approved.

Without Democratic alternatives to tee off on, Republicans on the panel instead trained their fire on a proposal submitted earlier this week by the League of Women Voters, Latino advocacy group the National Council of La Raza, and Common Cause Florida.

The coalition of groups asked Weatherford to offer on their behalf an alternative plan that included the concept of "nesting" three districts for the 120-member House inside each district in the 40-seat Senate. While the groups declined an offer to testify in support of their maps, they sent an 11-page letter to Weatherford's committee laying out the plan and blasting the Legislature's efforts so far.

"The maps proposed by the House and Senate Redistricting Committees promise to perpetuate a system of one-party control in Florida in clear violation of the Florida Constitution," the letter said.

Weatherford fired back at Friday's meeting, castigating the groups for refusing to appear.

"I think the citizens of Florida deserve better than a ... letter the night before the committee meets," he said. "And I think the citizens of Florida deserve better than a map proposed to this committee two and a half days before we take a vote."

House members also said the coalition's proposals — which failed on unanimous votes — wouldn't pass the compactness test laid out under the Fair Districts amendments.



“My three-year-old could draw something a little bit more compact than that,” said Rep. John Legg, R-Port Richey, about the organizations’ proposal for the Tampa Bay area.

Democrats joined the Republican members of the committee in shooting down the proposals, though Rep. Darryl Rouson, D-St. Petersburg, said he was concerned by the tone of the comments toward the league and its allies.

“I certainly would never tell an organization that they act like a 3-year-old or use some of the words that I heard today,” Rouson said.

Ben Wilcox, who represents the League of Women Voters and attended Friday’s meeting, declined to comment afterward.

Jenne, meanwhile, suggested that the treatment of the coalition’s proposals vindicated Democrats’ decision to pass on offering their own redistricting alternatives.

“We submit our own maps, everything that was said about the League of Women Voters would have been said about all of us sitting down at the end there,” he said.

Category: [Legislative HeadLINES](#)

Final House redistricting maps move to floor; Weinstein may run for Senate

In a party-line vote that could set up a Duval versus Nassau County state Senate race, the House Redistricting Committee passed redrawn versions Friday of the [House](#) and [congressional](#) maps.

The House map places Jacksonville Republican state Reps. Charles McBurney and Mike Weinstein in a district that covers southeast Jacksonville using the St. Johns River as its western border.

If the map a probable court challenge, Weinstein says he'd think about a run for the Senate seat being vacated by Stephen Wise, R-Jacksonville, due to term limits. Currently, Nassau County Republican Aaron Bean is filed to run for that seat.

The race would pit two experienced, well financed candidates against each other. Including political committees, Bean's has \$249,356 in the bank, while Weinstein is sitting on \$214,708. Because the 85 percent of the proposed district's population comes from Duval County, Weinstein said a Jacksonville candidate would be "substantially advantaged."

McBurney said he will run for reelection no matter where he lands.

The amended map also gives state Rep. Janet Adkins' Nassau County-based district the Dames Point Bridge. The bridge would be the only connecting point across the St. Johns River, which splits the proposed district. Questions about the previous proposal were raised because the only crossing point would have been the Mayport ferry, which may soon be shut down.

The committee spent most of the meeting teeing off on amendments filed by the supporters of new Fair Districts constitutional amendments. The group's proposed House and congressional maps, which were defeated by a unanimous vote, were torn to pieces because committee members said they drew less compact districts, and were filed less than three days before the scheduled vote.

"I think it is ironic that a group whose battle cry has been transparency filed their amendment 60 hours before" the scheduled vote, said state Rep. Chris Dorworth, R-Lake Mary.

The Fair Districts supporters say the proposed St. Augustine-based District 17 that includes state Rep. Ronald "Doc" Renuart, R-Ponte Vedra Beach, is "gerrymandered" to keep him from having to face Adkins, whose proposed district stops just north of Renuart's residence.

"District 17's northern border barely catches Renuart's residence," the letter reads. "By carefully keeping Renuart in District 17 and Adkins in District 11, they ... are not pitted against one another."

Staff director Alex Kelly made two points when dismissing the claim. First, he said the seats are constitutional because they use the border between Duval and St. Johns County, and second the Fair District's amendment "uses the same line."

The committee also passed the redrawn congressional lines with no major changes to Northeast Florida, and rubber-stamped the Senate maps approved the Senate Redistricting Committee. The full House will vote on the proposals next week.

Matt Dixon: (904) 716-8789



House panel approves Florida redistricting plans - Florida Wires

By BILL KACZOR

Posted on Friday, 01.27.12

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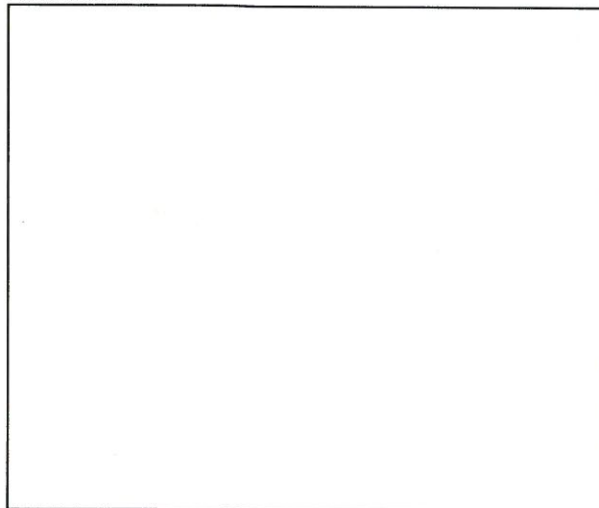
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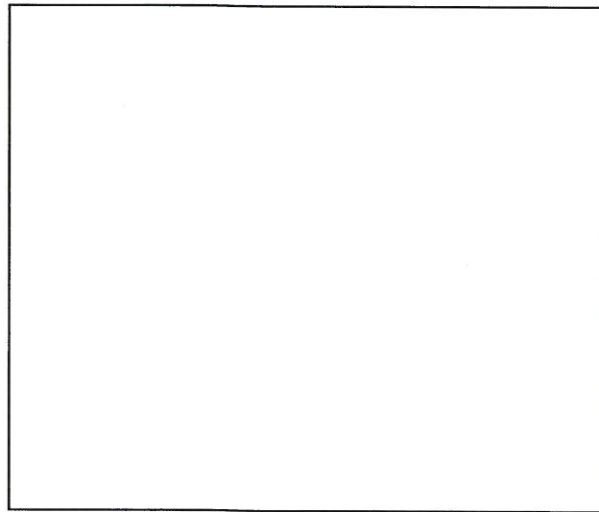
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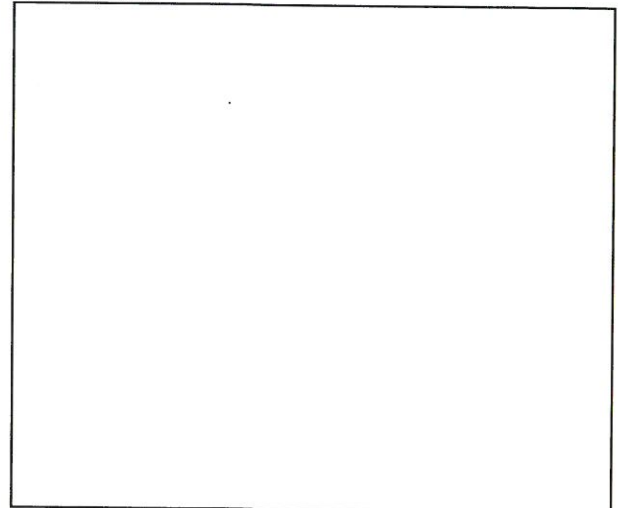


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Florida redistricting: Legislative and congressional maps set for House debate

By Aaron Deslatte, Tallahassee Bureau Chief 5:40 p.m. EST, January 27, 2012

TALLAHASSEE — Florida House leaders passed redistricting maps Friday and lambasted civil-rights groups that had backed the Fair Districts reforms and plan to argue in court the Legislature has thwarted the will of voters with "incumbent protection" plans.

The House Redistricting Committee advanced new maps for Florida's 160 state House and [Senate](#) seats and 27 congressional seats, keeping them on pace to clear the full Legislature by next week and begin the lengthy legal review that will determine whether they meet constitutional muster.

But in an eleventh-hour bit of theater, the groups that helped push the Fair Districts anti-gerrymandering reforms in 2010 got a tongue-lashing for not showing up to defend alternative proposals they had filed this week. In a 12-page letter sent Thursday night, the groups argued their alternatives were better because the committee-drawn maps helped incumbents, especially [Republicans](#).

"The maps proposed by the House and Senate Redistricting Committees promise to perpetuate a system of one-party control in Florida in clear violation of the Florida Constitution," said the letter, signed by Deirdre Macnab with the League of Women Voters, Eric Rodriguez with the National Council of La Raza and Peter Butzin with Common Cause of Florida.

"After 63 percent of Florida's voters demanded fair districts, the Legislature's maps ensure another decade of even greater one-sided partisan dominance and control."

Republicans currently hold 28 of 40 [Florida Senate](#) seats, 81 of 120 House seats and 19 of 25 existing congressional seats. Two new seats — including one in Central Florida likely to elect a Hispanic — will be created because of population gains.

The letter sparked a firm rebuke from House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, after he offered the groups' amendments as a courtesy and implored a Common Cause representative in the audience to defend them. When he demurred, Weatherford was prepared to pounce.

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"Little did we know that we were going to stay the course and do what we said we were going to do ... but that the January surprise has come from the very groups that accused us of not following the intent of the law."

The committee unanimously defeated the groups' amendments before passing its own maps along party lines.

On balance, the new congressional maps — which have been sanctioned by the Senate — make districts more Republican-leaning than the version the Senate passed last week, particularly along [Interstate 4](#) .

For example, Republican U.S. Rep. Dan Webster's seat in western Orange County is currently 39 percent Democratic and 36 percent Republican by registration, but would flip to 40 percent GOP and 37 percent Democratic under the plan.

adeslatte@orlandosentinel.com or 850-222-5564 .



Democrats prepare for partisan redistricting debate

By Aaron Deslatte, Tallahassee Bureau Chief 8:10 a.m. EST, January 12, 2012

TALLAHASSEE — A [Senate](#) panel advanced a rewrite of congressional and legislative districts Wednesday that creates a new Orlando-area Hispanic congressional seat, preserves three African-American leaning districts and maintains a Republican-tilted playing field.

The 21-5 vote came after two hours of debating and criticizing eleventh-hour alternatives filed by Minority Leader [Nan Rich](#), D-Weston, and groups that had pushed the Fair Districts anti-gerrymandering reforms passed last year.

The maps, one set drawn by the Florida [Democratic Party](#) and the other by the League of Women Voters, Democracia and Common Cause, would create districts more likely to vote for Democrats than those adopted by the Senate Reapportionment Committee.

Rich filed the maps this week as alternatives she plans to bring to the floor when the full Senate takes up the plans next week, arguing the [GOP](#) -preferred maps adhered too closely to current gerrymandered districts that "pack" minorities into a select few urban districts in order to ensure the surrounding ones are safely GOP-leaning.

"The population has changed," Rich said, referring to Hispanic gains over the last decade.

Republicans in charge of the once-a-decade redistricting process have said their maps reflect an unavoidable geographic reality based on where people live. And past court precedent, federal law and the Fair Districts amendments themselves don't allow lawmakers to diminish minority numbers in the Legislature and congressional delegation, they say.

Both Rich alternatives would reduce the number of minority voters in districts that now elect African-Americans.

Voter registration in the district held by U.S. [Rep. Corrine Brown](#), D-Jacksonville, would go from 49 percent black to 36 percent under Rich's plan. Under the LWV plan, it would drop to 34.7 percent. Both would draw a southern boundary at [Gainesville](#).

U.S. Rep. [Alcee Hastings](#), D-Miramar, would see his voter registration drop from 54 percent black to 48.5 percent under Rich's map and 48.5 percent under the LWV map.

Both maps would preserve black majorities in the 17th congressional district held by U.S. Rep. [Frederica Wilson](#), D-Miami.

Rich said Brown's district in particular — which now stretches from Jacksonville to Orlando -- doesn't comply with Fair Districts.

"It's not constitutional under the standards that we have in our constitution. Ten years ago, we didn't have those standards. Today we do have them," she said.

But one fellow Democrat on the committee, Sen. [Larcenia Bullard](#) of Miami, said Rich's maps would diminish minority voting strength in a half-dozen seats — including her own heavily Democratic Senate seat in Miami-Dade.

"We cannot do that," Bullard said.

The congressional map advancing to the Senate floor next Tuesday preserves all three black districts pretty much as-is. The committee also advanced its own Senate maps on a 22-4 vote.

A *Sentinel* analysis indicates the Democratic maps would create 14 congressional districts in which Democrats had more voters, compared to 13 with a Republican voter advantage. Looking at performance,

15 districts on the Democrats' map would have gone to Republican [Rick Scott](#) in the 2010 governor's race and 12 to Democrat [Alex Sink](#) . In 2008, [John McCain](#) would have won 13 districts and Democrat [Barack Obama](#) would have won 14.

With the current 25 congressional districts (Florida gains two seats in reapportionment), 15 have a GOP voter-edge and 10 have a Democratic tilt. The 2010 gubernatorial and 2008 presidential outcomes are also more lopsided in favor of Republicans — because Democratic voters are more urban and concentrated in urban districts.

Rich's Senate map contrasts similarly to the GOP-designed maps. Scott would have won 23 of the 40 Senate seats in her version. Scott won 25 of the current districts and would have won 26 in the maps passed Wednesday.

After the meeting, state GOP chair Lenny Curry blasted Rich and the Democrats for violating the Fair Districts prohibition against maps drawn to favor political parties. "Today's news makes it clear that Florida Democrats say one thing while doing another by pushing maps that favor Democrats and diminish the possibility of African-Americans representing their communities of interest," he said.

"This is an outrageous demonstration of hypocrisy by Florida's Democrats."

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House Rejects 'January Surprise' from Fair Districts Coalition on Voting Maps

[House Redistricting Committee](#) members strongly rejected last-minute remapping efforts offered by the group behind the voter-approved method to reduce political gerrymandering as new congressional and legislative lines were pushed forward on Friday.

Committee members, whose proposals now head to a full floor vote next week, criticized the offerings from the Fair Districts coalition, saying the group has been noticeably absent since the Legislature conducted a statewide tour last summer to gather input on the once-a-decade redistricting based upon the changes required in Amendments 5 and 6.

Rep. Chris Dorworth, R-Heathrow, called it frustrating that the group accusing them of not being transparent, submitted maps 60 hours before the meeting.

The committee's legal consultants were even more critical, claiming the coalition's maps would reduce minority representation and violate the 2010 voter-supported amendments, which prohibit lawmakers from drawing state [House](#), [Senate](#) and [congressional](#) lines that favor any incumbent or political party, keep counties and cities within a single district whenever possible, and protect minority voting strengths.

Committee Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said he agreed, as a courtesy, to submit the map proposals from the coalition to the committee. He had received the coalition maps earlier in the week.

The coalition -- comprised of the League of Women Voters, the National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida -- had a lobbyist at the meeting, but declined to participate in the workshop.

In a 12-page letter to Weatherford on Thursday, the coalition stated that their proposals comply with the Fair Districts amendments, while those under consideration by the committee and already approved by the Senate fail to comply with the wishes of the voters.

"Although we have only had a day to analyze the committee's latest congressional and House maps, it appears that they, like previous submissions and like those passed by the Senate, do not comply with the Fair Districts amendments," the coalition stated in the letter.

"Specifically, it appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents."

The coalition, which has accused legislators of favoring incumbents and ignoring public input since before last summer's statewide workshop, goes on to claim that the Legislature's proposals fail to use geographic boundaries where feasible, as is mandated by the amendments.

"Moreover, our districts contain far more whole counties and whole cities than do the Legislature's proposed maps," the coalition continued.

Weatherford called the coalition's map proposals a "January surprise."

"When we first put out our maps, people recognized the amount of incumbents that would be running against each other. Many members within this room did not believe these were going to be the real maps; they thought surely members would not draw maps that would take themselves out of their districts," Weatherford said.

"They thought surely there'll be some January surprise or February surprise that would come into the process and will save everyone.

"Little did we know that not only were we going to stay the course and do what we said we were going to do since March (2011), that the January surprise would come from the very organization that told us that they

didn't think we'd be transparent or open; or that we wouldn't follow the law."

Redistricting maps head to Florida House floor, critics cry foul

TALLAHASSEE — A House committee gave the final tweaks to the state's redistricting maps Friday and set them up for a final vote next week despite strong criticism from the Fair Districts coalition, which helped bring the new standards into law.

The committee voted along party lines to advance the maps to the House floor next Thursday. If approved, as expected, they will be sent to the Florida Supreme Court for its required 30-day review.

The maps are the first to be drawn according to the new anti-gerrymandering rules imposed by voters in 2010, and the results are historic.

At least 38 House members could be pitted against each other or forced out of office because of the new political boundary lines.

And two new congressional seats are drawn — one in North Florida and another in Central Florida — to accommodate Florida's decade of population growth. Voters will have the option of electing more minorities because of new minority access seats in the state House, Senate and congressional maps.

"We are setting a course for how future legislators and how future members of this chamber will handle the redistricting process," said Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, chairman of the House Redistricting Committee. "It's bigger than this process and it's bigger than today."

While the Fair Districts coalition commended the House for drawing more compact districts, it also accused legislators of strategically protecting incumbents, picking favorites in competitive areas, packing minority voters into minority districts and strategically cementing a Republican majority for the next decade — all alleged violations of the new standards in the state Constitution.

"It appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents," wrote representatives from the League of Women Voters, the National Council of La Raza and Common Cause in a joint letter to Weatherford late Thursday.

The 12-page letter cited examples in every map and in all regions of the state. The House's congressional map, for example, improved U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's South Florida district with more Republican areas, "thereby reducing her vulnerability" in a district that had been trending increasingly Democratic, it said.

U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart's new District 25, also in South Florida, "received more Republican voters to make his seat safer," the group alleged. And in the Senate map, Sen. Jack Latvala, a Clearwater Republican "rumored to be eyeing the Senate Presidency, is likewise placed in a district with stronger Republican performance," the group wrote.

But Weatherford and the Republican-dominated committee forcefully pushed back against the detailed critique.

"I think it's an unfortunate and more likely a legal stunt that this has taken, and I frankly find it offensive personally," Weatherford said.

"A lot of people predicted there would be a January surprise within this House," he said, referring to the presumption that many legislators wouldn't stand to have so many incumbents pitted against each other. But, he said, "little did we know ... the January surprise would come from the very organization that told us that they didn't think we would be transparent or follow the law."

The coalition submitted three alternative maps for lawmakers to consider earlier this week and were asked by Weatherford to appear before the committee to defend and explain them. The coalition refused.

In Pinellas, the House plan would place Rep. Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg, in a district with Rep. Larry Ahern, R-Seminole. In Tampa, Republican Reps. James Grant and Shawn Harrison are forced into the same

district. But Ahern is considering selling his home, buying a smaller place he and his wife desire, and moving north into another district that would have no incumbent because Rep. Jim Frishe, R-St. Petersburg, is running for Senate. Meanwhile, Kriseman is weighing whether to run for St. Petersburg mayor in 2013.

House committee passes its redistricting maps, slapping back criticism from Fair Districts groups | Florida politics blog: The Buzz

The House Redistricting Committee forcefully pushed back against a blistering critique of their redistricting maps from the Fair Districts group that proposed the new standards and Friday rejected the group's alternative maps before passing three of its own.

"I think it's an unfortunate and more likely a legal stunt that this has taken, and I frankly find it offensive personally," said Rep. **Will Weatherford**, R-Wesley Chapel, chairman of the committee, referring to a 12-page letter sent by the coalition of voters groups.

Despite his disappointment, Weatherford offered the maps for the House and congressional districts submitted jointly by the League of Women Voters, La Raza and Common Cause as an alternative to the committee's staff-drawn maps -- [which result in at least 38 lawmakers pitted against each other](#).

With the amendment teed up, the committee then roundly beat up on it, with Democrats joining Republicans to kill it. Weatherford even urged his colleagues to oppose his own amendment.

"A lot of people predicted there would be a January surprise within this House," Weatherford said, referring to the presumption that many legislators wouldn't stand to have so many incumbents pitted against each other. But, he said, "little did we know that not only did we stay the course...but that the January surprise would come from the very organization that told us that they didn't think we would be transparent or follow the law. So, the January surprise has come from them."

The coalition had submitted the maps earlier this week and were asked by Weatherford to appear before the committee to defend and explain them. Instead, [the coalition sent the committee a 12-page letter](#) that accused legislators of strategically protecting incumbents, picking favorites in competitive areas, packing minority voters into districts and strategically securing a Republican majority for the next decade.

"Although we have only had a day to analyze the Committee's latest Congressional and House maps, it appears that they, like previous submissions and like those passed by the Senate do not comply with the FairDistricts Amendments," wrote **Deirdre Macnab** of the League of Women Voters, **Eric Rodriguez** of the Council of La Raza and **Peter Butzin** with Common Cause of Florida.

Rep. **Eric Eisnaugle**, R-Orlando, noted that absent from the letter was any indication that several members of the legislature had been drawn into the same district. For example, Eisnaugle is pitted against Rep. **Steve Precourt** under the new map, he said. "And yet this letter fails to even put it in a footnote. I find it disingenuous. I find the amendment disingenuous."

Rep. **Ritch Workman**, R-Melbourne, said that the concept of nesting House districts within Senate districts, advanced by the coalition, violates the goal of protecting minority strength and will make it difficult to elect Hispanics. "I find it insulting," he said.

Rep. **Mack Bernard**, D-West Palm Beach, also said he would vote against the map since he didn't have time to review it.

Rep. **Chris Dorworth**, R-Lake Mary, questioned the source of the maps and whether they were from "operatives for one political party."

"Instead, what we see today is a map, a half hearted explanation and a refusal to address it at all," he said.

Finally, Rep. **John Legg**, R-Tampa, blasted the coalition maps as violation the standards of compactness. "My three year old could draw something a little bit more compact than that," he said. "That is anything but compact."

The committee unanimously rejected all of the maps, then voted along party lines to advance the maps to

the House floor next Thursday. House and Senate leaders have agreed to give final approval to the proposals next week so the Legislative redistricting maps can be submitted to the Florida Supreme Court next week for its 30-day review.

At the end, Rep. Darryl Rouson, D-St. Petersburg, chastised the behavior of some lawmakers that criticized the coalition's effort as a childish effort. "Attack the policy; attack the process," he said. "Leave the pejoratives out."

-- *Dave Decamp and Mary Ellen Klas*

House to Move on Redistricting, Budget

Published: Thursday, January 26, 2012 at 11:36 p.m.

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House Speaker Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park, said Thursday the House will approve redistricting plans next week and a budget the following week.

Cannon said he expects to take the redistricting plans to the House floor Feb. 2 and 3. The Senate has already approved its redistricting plans but has been slow to move forward with a budget.

[House to Move on Redistricting, BudgetTheLedger.com](#) January 26, 2012 11:36 PM

<p>House Speaker Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park, said Thursday the House will approve redistricting plans next week and a budget the following week.</p><p>Cannon said he expects to take the redistricting plans to the House floor Feb. 2 and 3. The Senate has already approved its redistricting plans but has been slow to move forward with a budget.</p>

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State redistricting maps headed to House floor

Tallahassee, Florida - Florida's high stakes, once-a-decade process of redrawing its political boundaries passes another big milestone at the state Capitol.

The House Redistricting Committee Friday passed its versions of House, Senate and Congressional maps. Now they head to the House floor for debate.

Democrats voted against the maps, saying they preserve the Republicans' 2-to-1 majority in the Legislature when, in fact, there are slightly more registered Democrats in Florida.

Republicans say they're proud of the maps and contend they follow new constitutional requirements to not favor incumbents or political parties, to be [compact](#) and preserve minority voting strength.

Committee Chairman Rep. Will Weatherford insists the maps are not political.

"I've never looked at political [data](#) on what the map does. I still couldn't tell you what the political implications are. All I care about are the legal implications. Did we follow what the constitution said we had to do. And I think the answer to that is emphatically yes."

The committee considered a new map submitted this week from the League of Women Voters, which criticized the House maps as an intentional effort to reconfigure districts to strengthen weaker incumbents.

But the League declined to explain the map before the committee and the measure was voted down.

Weatherford called the accusation disappointing.

"We've worked so hard to include the public in this process and we've always been accused that we might come up with some last-minute amendment to change the maps and we didn't do that. We drew a very fair map and for any organization to come in late, to write us a letter, tell us our map is wrong and is unconstitutional and then draft their own map and not have the guts to stand before this committee and explain what their maps does, I just thought that was in poor form. Nothing could be further from the truth. There's not an ounce of political intent in these maps."

Rep. Darryl Rouson, D-Tampa, voted against the proposed maps.

"I'm not happy with the product. But the process, there was an attempt to be transparent, to be inclusive. To hear the people, but as much as we would have liked politics to play out of it, I think politics played in it."

State lawmakers held 26 public hearings around the state last summer to solicit input from people on redistricting. Weatherford says many of those suggestions are in the final maps.

The Senate has already passed its maps for Senate and congressional seats. Leaders in the House and Senate have agreed to accept each other's maps for their own chambers.

Dave Heller

Kelly, Alex

From: Duffy, Ryan
Sent: Wednesday, February 01, 2012 1:33 PM
To: will@willweatherford.com
Cc: Carter, Allison; Katie Betta (katie@deancannon.com); Lair, Ralph; Kelly, Alex
Subject: Editorial: New districts seem to meet new guidelines

Great editorial on redistricting from the Charlotte Sun-Herald.

New districts seem to meet new guidelines

OUR POSITION: New legislative maps minimize distortions. They were devised in a transparent process that did seem to follow the principles of Amendments 5 and 6.

In 2010, Florida voters overwhelmingly supported constitutional amendments intended to prevent legislative districts twisted to the political manipulations of gerrymandering. The amendments required that redistricting "not be done to favor or disfavor an incumbent or political party." They had to respect the minority rights contained in the federal Voting Rights Act. They were to be contiguous, compact and drawn to make use of county, city and geographical boundaries.

By all appearances, the redistricting maps due for a vote in the Legislature this week do what the amendments set out to accomplish. You may argue they were drawn to favor Republicans — as Common Cause of Florida and the Florida League of Women Voters do — but we suspect those groups will have a difficult time proving outright manipulation in the courts.

It would have been naive to imagine any political process undertaken by a political body would be completely free of politics. Would a nonpartisan commission, or a court, have done better? We wonder. The real question is whether the result offends a reasonable person's concept of fair play. In this case, we don't think so.

For one thing, the Congressional, state House and Senate districts coming up for a vote this week are clearly more compact and contiguous than the old districts. They do follow county and city boundaries. There are fewer meandering tails and odd jigsaw pieces. You can see it by looking at them: Geographically, the maps make sense.

Take, for instance, Rep. Tom Rooney's old Congressional District 16, a bizarre form that stretches from Palm Beach Gardens up to Fort Pierce, around Lake Okeechobee and across the state to Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. In the new map, Rooney is drawn into a compact District 18 on the East Coast. Charlotte County becomes part of District 17, which encompasses DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands and Glades counties; it stretches from Punta Gorda east to Okeechobee and north to Lake Wales and Winter Haven.

Now, that is a big area. We are not thrilled about it. Would we have preferred Charlotte to be included in a coastal district? Yes. But the math involving smaller counties like Charlotte makes that difficult. Like it or not, Charlotte's 160,000 population means it will be a tack-on, either to smaller interior counties or bigger Sarasota or Lee counties.

Lee's new congressional district stretches south to Marco Island. Sarasota's new district includes all of Sarasota and Manatee counties. That is far more sensible than a previous redistricting map that split Sarasota and Manatee along Interstate 75 and included western portions of Charlotte County. The new District 16 removes DeSoto County and portions of West Charlotte County from Rep. Vern Buchanan's current District 13, but it is compact, contiguous, follows county boundaries and respects communities of interest. It also includes more Republicans, although an analysis by the Washington Post notes voting preferences in this district are trending Democratic.

That is the problem opponents will face when, as assumed, they take this to the courts. The maps may give the incumbent Republicans slightly more of an edge here and there, but it will be hard to prove advantages came from outright manipulation and not as fallout from the adherence to other primary guidelines.

The real point of Amendments 5 and 6 was to minimize the shenanigans that usually occur in redistricting. It put legislators on notice that distortions wouldn't be tolerated. It was intended to bring openness and transparency to the process. It was supposed to be fairer.

On the face of it, it seems that's what it did.

Ryan P. Duffy

Press Secretary

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Weatherford Rejects 'Rumors' House Redistricting Targets Rep. Allen West

Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, the chairman of the House Redistricting Committee, is rejecting comments making the rounds that he is leading efforts to drive U.S. Rep. Allen West, R-Plantation, from office.

“There are rumors that the Florida Legislature has targeted Congressman Allen West. This is patently false,” Weatherford stated in a Facebook posting. “I personally have supported and endorsed Allen West. I will continue to support this extraordinary member of Congress who has brought a much-needed conservative voice to Washington, D.C.”

On Monday, Rush Limbaugh stated on his [radio show](#) that “Florida Republicans are trying to -- in redistricting -- write it so that Allen West has no district, and the Republican establishment, whether it includes Romney or not, is behind it.”

The House [redistricting proposal](#) goes before the full House on Thursday.

Under the proposed congressional district lines drawn by the House, seats held by West and Rep. Steve Southerland, R-Panama City, may be considered more competitive.

Meanwhile, the redistricting lines for the state House could pit at least 38 of the 120 sitting House members into races with a colleague.

Around the State

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The Senate, which has already approved its maps, is expected to quickly approve the House proposals.

The Florida Supreme Court would then have 30 days to review the maps before they are presented to the governor.

Weatherford's full comment:

“Statement Regarding Redistricting and Congressman Allen West

“As the House Chairman of Redistricting, I have the responsibility to ensure there is a fair, open, and legally compliant process. The newly approved constitutional amendments, passed by more than 60 percent of Florida voters, require the Legislature to follow a set of standards. This is the first time the Legislature has been required to follow these legal standards.

“These new standards have resulted in disrupting the current districts for incumbents. The Tampa Bay Times stated that the House, Senate, and congressional maps represent 'a record-breaking shake-up in incumbency.' It has been reported that at least 38 members of the Florida Legislature do not currently live in their district.

“There are rumors that the Florida Legislature has targeted Congressman Allen West. This is patently false. I personally have supported and endorsed Allen West. I will continue to support this extraordinary member of Congress who has brought a much-needed conservative voice to Washington, D.C.

“However, my personal support cannot and will not trump the Constitution.”

Reach Jim Turner at <mailto:jturner@sunshinestatenews.com> or at (772) 215-9889.



Inside The Lines

House set to approve redistricting maps on Friday

Brandon Larrabee of the News Service of Florida reports that the House opened a two-day debate on a GOP-drawn redistricting proposal Thursday as the Legislature drew closer to the end of the first act of the once-a-decade drama.

Operating under the anti-gerrymandering Fair Districts standards for the first time, lawmakers said they had followed the voter-approved constitutional amendment by excluding politics from their considerations. House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said the proposals split fewer cities and counties — a key goal of Fair Districts supporters — and would set a new precedent for operating under the amendments.

“At the end of the day, this decision is bigger than us, this map is bigger than us, the Constitution is bigger than any one of us,” Weatherford said.



Republicans pushed through their version of the redistricting proposals — adding a House map to the legislative plan (SJR 1176) and overhauling a map for the state’s congressional delegation (SB 1174) — on party-line, 80-39 votes. A final vote on the amended bills, likely to also fall along party lines, is expected Friday.

Democrats tried to highlight problems with the maps, peppering Weatherford with questions and suggesting that the maps — which would include 73 districts won by Gov. Rick Scott in 2010 and 47 won by his Democratic opponent — don’t accurately reflect a state nearly even split in voter registration.

“A fair plan, by my definition ... in this state, should allow for 60 Republicans and 60 Democrats,” said Rep. Mia Jones, D-Jacksonville.

But Weatherford said that would have run counter to the amendments as well.

“If you’re saying we should engineer a political result to come from these maps, that is blatantly against the law,” he said.

Democrats tried to make their clearest point with an amendment to the map for the state Senate that was defeated on a unanimous, 118-0 vote. The proposal — offered by Rep. Evan Jenne, D-Dania Beach — was aimed at inoculating House Democrats from the charge leveled at their Senate counterparts: that the minority party was more interested in carping than offering alternatives.

The Jenne proposal would have made changes to the Senate maps reflecting earlier grumbling by Weatherford about the lines in Pasco County and criticism from Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland, about the way Polk County was divided by the Senate proposal. But the map would have blown apart a “gentlemen’s agreement” between the House and Senate to essentially trade each others’ maps for their respective chambers.

“Rather than wasting a lot of time on a bunch of map amendments that were destined to go down, we wanted to make the point that even one that benefited only Republicans would go down because the deal was already set,” said House Minority Leader Ron Saunders, D-Key West.

Republicans argued that the map would have watered down minority-friendly amendments protected by the federal Voting Rights Act and would have split additional cities.

Democrats also voted against the proposal to make the case that the Senate plan was too deeply flawed to be corrected even with Jenne’s amendment.

“While this map does improve the situation, there is no amendment that could completely fix this map and all

the problems it possesses,” Jenne said.

A vote on Friday could set up Senate action as soon as Tuesday — giving the Legislature time to redraw the legislative maps if they are eventually struck down by the Florida Supreme Court, which automatically reviews those plans. Gov. Rick Scott has the final say on the congressional maps, though those are likely to be challenged under the Voting Rights Act.

Senate President Mike Haridopolos said his chamber intended to move quickly to adopt the final House product.

“My biggest goal next week is reapportionment,” he said in an interview.

Category: [Legislative HeadLINES](#)

Redistricting maps are shuffling Florida's political landscape - Florida

By Mary Ellen Klas

Posted on Thursday, 02.02.12

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TALLAHASSEE -- For the last year, Broward Democratic Rep. Marty Kiar planned to run for the state Senate seat being vacated by Sen. Nan Rich of Weston.

But when the Senate released its redistricting maps in November, the Davie lawmaker was faced with a choice: run in a district based primarily in Palm Beach County, stay in his safe House district for two more years, or run in an open county commission district.

He chose to stay home and run for county commission. "It's a nice time to be with my two-and-a-half-year-old, my new baby and my wife," Kiar said, adding, "I've always wanted to serve for local office."

Kiar is among a growing list of legislators deciding to move to new posts as Florida lawmakers complete redistricting maps under new rules imposed by two constitutional amendments.

The Republican-dominated House voted 80-39 along party lines Thursday to give preliminary approval to three redistricting maps drawn according to the new anti-gerrymandering standards of the Fair Districts amendments approved by voters.

The amendments prohibit lawmakers — for the first time in Florida history — from drawing the districts with any intent to protect incumbents or political parties, and the results have shaken up the political landscape from Tallahassee to Jacksonville and from St. Petersburg to Miami.

The disruption is most apparent in the House, where 38 of the chamber's 120 incumbents are been drawn into districts with another member. The Senate and congressional maps, by contrast, don't appear to end the political careers of any incumbents.

Among those affected by the shakeup:

- Rep. Evan Jenne, D-Dania Beach, who has two years left on his term, is now considering running for an open seat on the Broward County Commission rather than challenge Rep. Joe Gibbons, D-Hallandale Beach.

Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, had hoped to run for Congress, but is now considering running for the New Port Richey House seat he once held.

- Rep. Larry Ahern, R-St. Petersburg, is considering moving to a neighboring district to avoid being matched up with two other St. Petersburg legislators, Rick Kriseman and Jim Frishe. Kriseman, a Democrat, is considering running for St. Petersburg mayor.

Rep. Scott Plakon, R-Longwood, is drawn into the same district as Rep. Scott Dorworth, R-Lake Mary, and has decided to rent an apartment in a neighboring district and run there.

Jenne, the fourth most senior member of the DemoDemocratic whip for five years, was not surprised, he said, when House Republican leaders drew him out of his current district.

The district Jenne has held went from including 140,000 people he has served for five years to 1,500 and was shifted from mostly Broward County to one that is 60 percent in Miami-Dade.

As the House took its first vote on the proposed redistricting maps on Thursday, Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said the match-ups are proof that legislators draw the maps with no attempt to protect political parties or incumbents.

"At no point did we let someone's address impact a decision that was made," Weatherford said.

But in hours of rigorous debate on Thursday, doubtful Democrats grilled Weatherford. They asked him if members knew they would be pitted against each other and when they learned of their fate.

Weatherford insisted that the addresses of members was never entered into the record, but acknowledged that some members were notified before the maps were made public that they would be pitted against another lawmaker.

By contrast, Kiar said, the Senate maps don't appear to be as blind to incumbency protection.

"I think the Senate maps are probably going to change a whole lot," he said. "This was an initial shot to protect every single incumbent Democrat and Republican and I think once the courts take a look at that they will ask them to draw them more fairly."

Republicans were not spared from the House's political dominoes either.

Rep. Mike Weinstein of Jacksonville, for example, said he expects to be facing off against fellow Republican Rep. Charles McBurney, also of Jacksonville.

"I always thought there would be some sort of conflict at the end," he said.

Jenne said he was angry at first when he saw the maps but now has accepted his fate. "There's two things that make Tallahassee go round — one is money the other is partisanship. This bill is 100 percent partisanship," he said. "It's been kind of a freeing experience because I've just been able to let it rip for the last month."

Mary Ellen Klas can

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Florida redistricting could give Orange County a Democratic House majority

By Aaron Deslatte, Tallahassee Bureau Chief 5:36 p.m. EST, February 2, 2012

TALLAHASSEE -- The new political maps the [Florida Legislature](#) is advancing could deliver a new Democratic tilt to the longtime Republican hub of Metro [Orlando](#).

Although [Orange County](#) has shifted Democratic by voter registration during the last decade, it has sent a Republican-heavy delegation to [Tallahassee](#) for years, highlighted by current House Speaker Dean Cannon, past Speaker Dan Webster and Senate President Toni Jennings.

But the new legislative maps would appear to level that playing field by drawing House districts more mindful of county lines -- removing several suburban seats that kept a foothold in Orange County although their voters were mostly in Seminole, Osceola, Lake and Brevard counties.

And the changing political lines in Orange County are offering some political cover to [Republicans](#) who are defending a redistricting work product that would still favor the GOP in statehouse and congressional elections statewide.

Here's the math: There are currently 12 state House districts that are wholly or partially contained within Orange County. All but three are held by Republicans.

Under the new maps, Orange would have nine House seats, including two Hispanic-leaning districts, two black-leaning seats and only three that venture beyond the county line. Two weeks ago, the House Redistricting Committee made a public point of advancing a map that created the second black seat -- instead of other alternatives that would have created one black seat with a higher concentration of minority voters.

"The good news is there is no packing whatsoever in this map," House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford said during floor debate Thursday. "I think we should be proud of that decision we made as a committee."

The issue surfaced during House debate Thursday when Rep. Darryl Rouson, D-St. Petersburg, questioned why the new "diminished, psycho-cosmic, retrogression, manufactured drawing of lines" for House districts tilted statewide toward Republicans despite the 2010 Fair Districts reforms.

"The plan appears to overwhelmingly favor Republican districts," Rouson said. "A fair plan, it appears, would be a 50-50 statewide partisan vote. Can you explain me why this map did not start out with 60 Republican and 60 Democratic seats?"

Weatherford replied that, "If you're saying we should engineer a political result to come from these maps, that is blatantly against the law and the reason we did not do that."

The House took up its legislative and congressional maps Thursday, with a final passage slated for today. The Senate could go along with the plans next week, triggering a lengthy legal review of the plans.

Orange's new map would have nine House seats split pretty evenly between parties. Four would lean Democratic, two could swing to a candidate from either party, and three look to be Republican-leaning because they reach into neighboring Seminole, Lake and Brevard counties.

And two prominent Republican House members -- Eric Eisnagle and Steve Precourt -- would both be drawn into the new District 44, a point Weatherford repeatedly referenced Thursday as evidence that House GOP leaders didn't violate the Fair Districts changes.

Precourt "knew very early in this process he would be drawn into a district ... with a good friend of his in Rep. Eisnagle," Weatherford said on the floor. "He knew that. Never once, never one single time, did Rep. Steve Precourt ever come to me ask me for a favor."

"For the first time in the redistricting process, we are putting principle over politics," Weatherford said.

Rep. Scott Randolph, D-Orlando, who would be in one of the four Democratic-leaning seats, said [Democrats](#) for the first time might be able to control the county delegation, which has been chaired by GOP legislators for more than a decade.

"You could see a delegation that flips 2-to-1 Democrat," said Randolph, who chairs the Orange County Democratic Party. "The little victories in life."

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Redistricting shuffles Florida's political landscape, changes lawmakers' plans - Florida Legislature

By MARY ELLEN KLAS

TALLAHASSEE -- For the last year, Broward Democratic Rep. Marty Kiar planned to run for the state Senate seat being vacated by Sen. Nan Rich of Weston.

But when the Senate released its redistricting maps in November, the Davie lawmaker was faced with a choice: run in a district based primarily in Palm Beach County, stay in his safe House district for two more years, or run in an open county commission district.

He chose to stay home and run for county commission. "It's a nice time to be with my 2-and-a-half-year-old, my new baby and my wife," Kiar said, adding, "I've always wanted to serve for local office."

From left, Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, Rep. Carlos Lopez-Cantera, R-Miami, and Rep. James Waldman, D-Coconut Creek confer before the house took up the redistricting bill during session on Thursday, Feb. 2, 2012, in Tallahassee, Fla. (AP Photo/Steve Cannon)

Kiar is among a growing list of legislators deciding to move to new posts as Florida lawmakers complete their redistricting maps under new rules imposed by two constitutional amendments.

The Republican-dominated House voted 80-39 along party lines Thursday to give preliminary approval to three redistricting maps drawn according to the new anti-gerrymandering standards of the Fair Districts amendments approved by voters.

The amendments prohibit lawmakers -- for the first time in Florida history -- from drawing the districts with any intent to protect incumbents or political parties and the results have shaken up the political landscape from Tallahassee to Jacksonville and from St. Petersburg to Miami.

The disruption is most apparent in the House, where 38 of the chamber's 120 incumbents are been drawn into districts with another member. The Senate and Congressional maps, by contrast, don't appear to end the political careers of any incumbents.

Among those affected by the shakeup:

nRep. Evan Jenne, D-Dania Beach, who has two years left on his term, is now considering running for an open seat on the Broward County Commission rather than challenge Rep. Joe Gibbons, D-Hallandale Beach.

nSen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, had hoped to run for Congress, but is now considering running for the New Port Richey House seat he once held.

nRep. Larry Ahern, R-St. Petersburg, is considering moving to a neighboring district to avoid being matched up with two other St. Petersburg legislators, Rick Kriseman and Jim Frishe. Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg, is considering running for mayor of St. Petersburg.

nRep. Scott Plakon, R-Longwood, is drawn into the same district as Rep. Scott Dorworth, R-Lake Mary, and has decided to rent an apartment in a neighboring district and run there.

Jenne, the fourth most senior member of the Democratic caucus who has been the Democratic whip for the last five years, was not surprised, he said, when House Republican leaders drew him out of his current district.

"I take it as a compliment," Jenne said. "It means I've caused a little bit of trouble over the last six years."

The district he has held went from including 140,000 people he has served for five years to 1,500 and was



shifted from mostly Broward County to one that is 60 percent in Miami-Dade County.

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State House passes redistricting maps along party lines

By [Marcello Iaia](#) | 02.03.12 | 4:10 pm

The Florida House today passed congressional, state House and state Senate maps that lay out how it wants voting districts to be drawn for the next decade.

The maps were the reason for an early start to the 2012 session. The maps will be reviewed in state and federal courts.

Speaker Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park, said the maps were historic for not favoring incumbents or political parties in a state that has been heavily gerrymandered in the past. Cannon expressed “more than a little disappointment” in members whom he said failed to acknowledge the nonpartisan process.

The drawing of the maps has been given close attention not just for its once-a-decade rarity, but because of the “Fair Districts” amendments approved by Florida voters in November 2010. Amendments 5 and 6 require districts to be compact, using geographic boundaries and protecting racial and language minorities. They must also adhere to standards set forth by the federal Voting Rights Act.

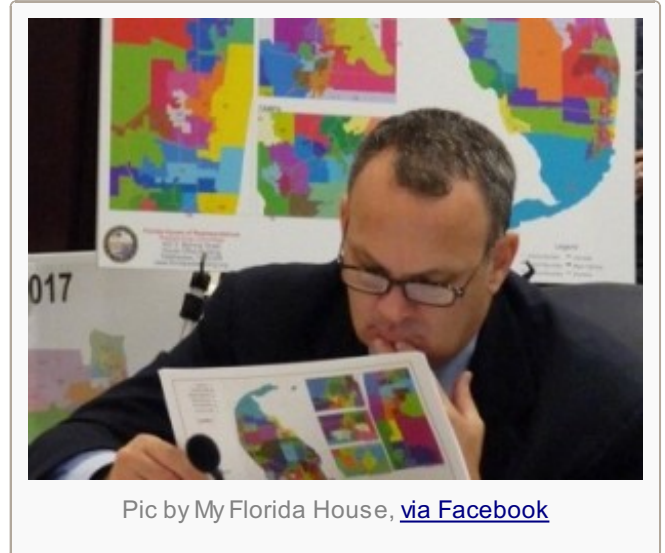
On the second day the bill was on the floor, representatives were lashing back at those who suggested there was partisan intent or racial packing in the maps.

This is the final stop for the Senate map, but the state Senate will have to approve the congressional and House maps.

Each bill received 80 yeas and 37 nays, along party lines.

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Florida redistricting maps shake up the House

TALLAHASSEE - For the last year, Broward Democratic Rep. Marty Kiar planned to run for the state Senate seat being vacated by Sen. Nan Rich of Weston.

But when the Senate released its redistricting maps in November, the Davie lawmaker was faced with a choice: Run in a district based primarily in Palm Beach County, stay in his safe House district for two more years, or run in an open county commission district.

He chose to stay home and run for county commission. "It's a nice time to be with my 21/2-year old, my new baby and my wife," Kiar said, adding, "I've always wanted to serve for local office."

Kiar is among a growing list of legislators deciding to move to new posts as Florida lawmakers complete their redistricting maps under new rules imposed by two constitutional amendments.

The Republican-dominated House voted 80-39 along party lines Thursday to give preliminary approval to three redistricting maps that they say are drawn to new anti-gerrymandering standards created by the Fair Districts amendments approved by voters.

The amendments prohibit lawmakers - for the first time in Florida history - from drawing the districts with any intent to protect incumbents or political parties, and the results have shaken up the political landscape from Tallahassee to Jacksonville and from St. Petersburg to Miami.

The disruption, however, is most apparent in the House, where 38 of the chamber's 120 incumbents have been drawn into districts with another member. Senate and Congressional maps, by contrast, don't appear to threaten to end the political careers of any incumbents.

In the House:

. Rep. Evan Jenne, D-Dania Beach, who has two years left on his term, is now considering running for an open seat on the Broward County Commission rather than challenge Rep. Joe Gibbons, D-Hallandale Beach.

. Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, had hoped to run for Congress but is now considering running for the New Port Richey House seat he once held.

. Rep. Larry Ahern, R-St. Petersburg, is considering moving to a neighboring district to avoid being matched up with two other St. Petersburg legislators, Rick Kriseman and Jim Frishe. Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg, is considering running for mayor of St. Petersburg.

. Rep. Scott Plakon, R-Longwood, is drawn into the same district as Rep. Scott Dorworth, R-Lake Mary, and has decided to rent an apartment in a neighboring district and run there.

Jenne, the fourth most senior member of the Democratic caucus who has been the Democratic whip for the last five years, was not surprised, he said, when House Republican leaders drew him out of his current district.

"I take it as a compliment," Jenne said. "It means I've caused a little bit of trouble over the last six years."

The district he has held went from including 140,000 people he has served for five years to 1,500 and was shifted from mostly Broward County to one that is 60 percent in Miami-Dade County.

As the House took its first vote in the proposed redistricting maps Thursday, redistricting chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said the match-ups are proof that legislators draw the maps with no attempt to protect political parties or incumbents.

By contrast, Kiar said, the Senate maps don't appear to be as blind to incumbency protection.

"I think the Senate maps are probably going to change a whole lot," he said. "This was an initial shot to protect every single incumbent Democrat and Republican, and I think once the courts take a look at that they will ask them to draw them more fairly."

How it was done

Find out more about Florida's redistricting process at [**tampabay.com/redistricting**](https://tampabay.com/redistricting).

House passes redistricting maps with a party line vote

The Florida House voted along party lines for three redistricting maps Friday that proponents say reflect the state's growing diversity and meet new anti-gerrymandering standards.

But Democrats, who united in opposition in the 80-38 votes, said the proposals are unconstitutional because they manipulate political boundaries for Republican advantage, particularly a Senate map that appears to protect every returning incumbent.

Despite the criticism, House Republican leaders congratulated themselves for finishing the maps with four weeks left in the session, and doing it with unprecedented public input.

"What we have just done is historic and rare," said House Speaker **Dean Cannon** after the House finished two-days of lengthy debates.

The maps rewrite legislative and congressional district lines to accommodate the last decade of growth. They create two new congressional seats, bringing the state total to 27, and they are intended to increase the number of Hispanics elected to the state House, Senate and Congress.

But Rep. **Perry Thurston**, the incoming Democratic leader from Plantation, blasted the maps as failing to accommodate the desires of voters when they approved the anti-gerrymandering Amendments 5 and 6.

"These maps don't level the playing field," he said, suggesting that with Florida Democrats having about 500,000 more registered voters than Republicans, the margin in the state House should be closer to 60-60, not the projected 73-47 split expected in the maps.

He pointed to the proposed Senate map, which appear to endanger no sitting incumbents from either party and called it "the most blatant incumbent protection map we've ever seen." He chastised Republican leaders for agreeing to accept the "sight unseen" Senate map without alterations as "an abdication of our responsibility."

House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford** countered Thurston repeatedly. He said there was no intent to favor a political party and accused Democrats of criticizing the maps as part of a legal strategy to challenge them in court.

"If the drafters of this amendment wanted 60 Republicans and 60 Democrats, they would have put it in the Constitution," Weatherford said. "To create any type of political outcome violates the letter of the law, so we're not going to do it and we didn't do it."

While the Senate and Congressional maps appear to spare incumbents, the House map pits at least 38 lawmakers against each other next November, forcing many of them to move or rent apartments in adjoining districts, run for another elective office, end their careers or run against each other. It's the result, Republican leaders said, of their incumbent-blind approach to drawing districts.

"I hope I'm not the only one moving," joked Rep. **Dennis Baxley**, R-Ocala. "I hope it'll help the housing market here in Florida."

The House and Senate maps will go to the Senate next week for expected quick approval. They will then be reviewed by the attorney general and sent to the Florida Supreme Court. The high court will have 30 days to review them and either approve, or send them back to lawmakers for a do-over.

The congressional map will go to the governor, who will have seven days to sign it and submit it to the U.S. Justice Department for the required Voting Rights Act review.

The Republican-led legislature fast-tracked the redistricting process with the hope that if their newly-minted maps are rejected by the court, lawmakers can rewrite them before their session adjourns on March 9.

Florida House passes redistricting maps in Week 4 – Central Florida Political Pulse – Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — The Florida House of Representatives voted along party lines Friday for new political maps that would reflect the state's growing diversity, but which critics contend would perpetuate the engineering of one-party control of government.

The 80-37 votes for new legislative and congressional maps came after parts of two days spent debating whether the 2010 anti-gerrymandering reforms adopted by voters required lawmakers to craft plans that more evenly divide the political parties — or protect minority voting-rights above all else.

Unlike the last two rounds of redistricting, the Florida Legislature is poised to pass its maps by the midpoint of the 60-day session when the Senate follows suit next week. Although the maps are expected to be challenged by Democrats and voting-rights groups in state and federal court, Republican lawmakers praised them as a historic moment in Florida's often turbulent redistricting past. Twenty years ago, the House and Senate failed to agree on congressional maps at all, punting the job to the courts.

"What we have just done is historic and rare," House Speaker **Dean Cannon** said from the House rostrum.

[The plans](#) would boost the number of Hispanic lawmakers likely to be elected to the House, Senate and 27-member congressional delegation this year. Because those seats require tying together elongated urban areas in order to capture enough minority voters, they create surrounding suburban seats more likely to favor Republicans. The end result is the maps would still likely elect more Republicans than Democrats, even though the Florida Democratic Party has a roughly 500,000-voter advantage in the state.

Incoming House Democratic Leader **Perry Thurston** of Plantation called the proposed Senate districts "the most blatant incumbent protection map we've ever seen" because they appear to endanger no incumbents. He criticized Republican leaders on the floor for agreeing to accept them as-is from the Senate.

"That's an abdication of our responsibility," Thurston said. "The partisan performance of the district tells you that Amendments 5 and 6 have not been applied to these maps."

But House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford** balked at that suggestion, and accused Democrats of voting against the plans as part of a legal strategy to continue fighting them in court.

"If you're voting no because an attorney that is not part of this process says to vote no, that's wrong," the Wesley Chapel Republican said.

"If the decision is based on politics, and you're pushing that red button because an attorney told you to, I can't respect that."

Fair Districts groups won't defend their maps, but send a letter – Central Florida Political Pulse – Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — The Florida League of Women Voters, Common Cause and National Council of La Raza are going to take a pass on House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford's** invitation to defend amendments to the Legislature's new maps today.

But they did send a letter in which they lay out their rationale for why the maps set for to pass out of the legislature next week don't meet the new standards set forth in Amendments 5 and 6.

Weatherford's committee today is slated to take up amendments offered by Rep. **Steve Precourt**, R-Orlando, to all three House, Senate and congressional maps and send them to floor. On balance, the changed congressional maps — which have been sanctioned by the Senate — make the congressional delegation more Republican-leaning than the version the Senate passed last week, particularly along the swath of Interstate 4.

The Fair Districts supporters argue that all the maps appear intended to help incumbents and the party in power.

"Although we have only had a day to analyze the Committee's latest Congressional and House maps, it appears that they, like previous submissions and like those passed by the Senate do not comply with the FairDistricts Amendments," reads the letter sent last night, signed by **Deirdre Macnab** with LWV, **Eric Rodriguez** with La Raza and **Peter Butzin** with Common Cause of Florida.

"Specifically, it appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents."

The group has filed alternatives to all three maps that it argues in its detailed, 12-page letter include fewer city and county splits, as well as score higher in statistical analyses of compactness.

"The maps proposed by the House and Senate Redistricting Committees promise to perpetuate a system of one-party control in Florida in clear violation of the Florida Constitution," they close.

"After 63% of Florida's voters demanded fair districts, the Legislature's maps ensure another decade of even greater one-sided partisan dominance and control. In Florida, political gerrymandering has been a pervasive and persistent problem for decades."

[ltr to Weatherford1-26-12](#)

House panel approves Florida redistricting plans - Florida Wires

By BILL KACZOR

Posted on Friday, 01.27.12

Posted on Friday, 01.27.12

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Three groups that backed Florida's new anti-gerrymandering constitutional amendments say redistricting maps that cleared a House committee on Friday will perpetuate Republican legislative and congressional dominance in a state that's almost evenly divided between the two major parties.

House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, a Wesley Chapel Republican, denied the maps were drawn to favor the GOP and threw the allegation back at the Fair District coalition groups.

He said he was disappointed they would criticize the Legislature's maps yet refuse to appear before his committee to defend their own proposals, which the panel unanimously rejected before taking final action.

"It's a frankly unfortunate political, and more likely probably a legal, stunt," Weatherford said.

The committee approved its maps on party line votes, Republicans for and Democrats against.

"There's two things that make Tallahassee go around," said Democratic Rep. Evan Jenne of Dania Beach. "One is money and the other is partisanship, and this is 100 percent partisanship."

Floor debate will begin next Thursday with final action the following day, Weatherford said.

The Senate already has approved maps for its 40 districts and the state's 27 congressional seats. The panel accepted the Senate-passed map for its chamber. The Senate likewise intends to accept the House-drawn map for that chamber's 120 districts.

The committee also agreed to a proposed compromise on the congressional map. Weatherford said he's confident the Senate will accept it.

While the Florida League of Women Voters, National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida declined to testify, the Fair District advocates submitted an 11-page letter. It outlines their proposals and why they believe the Legislature's maps violate the two state constitutional amendment voters adopted in 2010.

Both Fair Districts amendments, one each covering the legislature and Congress, prohibit intentionally drawing districts to favor or disfavor incumbents or a political party. They also protect the rights of minorities to elect representatives of their choosing and require districts to be compact and use existing political and geographical boundaries where feasible.

The letter says the Legislature's maps "promise to perpetuate a system of one-party control in Florida in clear violation of the Florida Constitution." The Fair District groups also contend the maps miss the mark by protecting incumbents.

Republicans denied those allegations.

"I've never looked at political data on what the map does," Weatherford said. "I still couldn't tell you what the political implications are."

He also cited media reports indicating the committee's House map would place nearly a third of current members out of their existing districts or pair them against another incumbent.

The congressional compromise as well would displace a few incumbents from existing districts but unlike legislators, they are not required to live in their districts. The Senate map, though, does not double up or displace incumbents except for a couple who cannot seek re-election due to term limits.

The letter contends the House and Senate congressional maps each have 14 safe Republican seats and only seven safe Democratic seats. The rest are competitive but most also lean Republican, the groups say.

Republicans currently hold 19 congressional seats and Democrats only six. The new maps add two more seats to bring Florida's total to 27 because of population gains.

The groups predict the maps will enable Republicans to win two to three times as many congressional seats as Democrats and twice as many seats in the state House and Senate.

They allege the maps continue to put large percentages of Democrats including minorities into a relatively small number of districts to give Republicans a better chance of winning the others although by narrower margins.

The groups' own proposals included a plan to "nest" three state House districts in each Senate district. Their maps also would have reduced the percentages of minorities in certain districts, notably one now held by U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, a black Democrat from Jacksonville. Blacks currently make up slightly less than 50 percent of the voting age population in Brown's district that snakes from Jacksonville to Orlando. The House map would increase that to 50.05 percent while the Fair Districts backers' plan would cut it to 35 percent.

The letter argues the lower percentage would be sufficient for a black to win a Democratic primary and then the general election in a Democratic-heavy district.

House lawyer George Meros told the panel that much of a reduction in black voting strength would violate both the Florida Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act.

Once lawmakers pass the plans, the legislative maps go to the Florida Supreme Court and the congressional plan to Gov. Rick Scott.

Then all the maps must obtain preclearance from the U.S. Justice Department or a federal court to determine if they comply with the Voting Rights Act.

House counters critics, passes redistricting maps - Legislature

By Mary Ellen Klas and David DeCamp

Posted on Saturday, 01.28.12

Posted on Sunday, 01.29.12

TALLAHASSEE -- A House committee gave the final tweaks to the state's redistricting maps Friday and set them up for a final vote this week despite strong criticism from the Fair Districts coalition, which helped bring the new standards into law.

The committee voted along party lines to advance the maps to the House floor Thursday. If approved, as expected, they will be sent to the Florida Supreme Court for its required 30-day review, which will decide if they comply with state and federal redistricting standards.

The maps are the first to be drawn according to the new anti-gerrymandering rules imposed by voters in 2010, and the results are historic:

- At least 38 House members could be pitted against each other or forced out of office because of the new political boundary lines, cities and counties remain more compact than either of the redistricting maps of the past two decades,
- Two new congressional seats are drawn — one in North Florida and another in Central Florida — to accommodate Florida's decade of population growth, and voters will have the option of electing more minorities because of new minority access seats in the state House, Senate and congressional maps.

"We are setting a course for how future legislators and how future members of this chamber will handle the redistricting process," said Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, chairman of the House Redistricting Committee. "It's bigger than this process and it's bigger than today."

While the Fair Districts coalition commended the House for drawing more compact districts, it also accused legislators of strategically protecting incumbents, picking favorites in competitive areas, packing minority voters into minority districts and strategically cementing a Republican majority for the next decade — all alleged violations of the new standards in the state Constitution.

"It appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents," wrote representatives from the League of Women Voters, the National Council of La Raza and Common Cause in a joint letter to House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford late Thursday.

The 12-page letter cited examples in every map and in all regions of the state. The House's congressional map, for example, improved the chances of U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's district with more Republican areas, "thereby reducing her vulnerability" in a district that had been trending increasingly Democratic, it said.

U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart's new District 25, also "received more Republican voters to make his seat safer," the group alleged. And in the Senate map, Sen. Jack Latvala, a Clearwater Republican "rumored to be eyeing the Senate Presidency, is likewise placed in a district with stronger Republican performance," the group wrote.

But Weatherford and the Republican-dominated committee forcefully pushed back against the detailed critique.

"I think it's an unfortunate and more likely a legal stunt that this has taken, and I frankly find it offensive personally," Weatherford said.

"A lot of people predicted there would be a January surprise within this House," he said, referring to the presumption that many legislators wouldn't stand to have so many incumbents pitted against each other. But, he said, "little did we know... the January surprise would come from the very organization that told us that

they didn't think we would be transparent or follow the law."

The coalition submitted three alternative maps for lawmakers to consider earlier this week and were asked by Weatherford to appear before the committee to defend and explain them. The coalition refused and the House committee blasted them for it and unanimously rejected all of their maps.

"My three-year-old could draw something a little bit more compact than that," said Rep. John Legg, R-Port Richey.

In Pinellas, the changes would pit Rep. Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg, in a district with Rep. Larry Ahern, R-Seminole. In Tampa, Republican Rep. James Grant and Shawn Harrison are forced into the same district. But Ahern is considering selling his home, buying a smaller place he and his wife desire, and moving north into another district that would have no incumbent because Rep. Jim Frishe, R-St. Petersburg, is running for Senate. Meanwhile, Kriseman is weighing to run instead for St. Petersburg mayor in 2013.

In Broward, Democratic Reps. Elaine Schwartz of Hollywood and Perry Thurston of Plantation are in the same district. Reps. Joe Gibbons of Hallandale Beach, and Evan Jenne of Dania Beach, both Democrats would also face off.

In Miami, Democratic Reps. Daphne Campbell, John Patrick Julien and Barbara Watson would be forced into the same districts. Republican Reps. Eddy Gonzalez of Hialeah and Jose Oliva of Miami Lakes would face each other. And Republican Reps. Jose Felix Diaz and Ana Rivas Logan, both of Miami, would also face a fight.

"Many of us knew this was coming," said Jenne, who said he is still weighing his options. "A lot of folks are going to be making a change."

Mary Ellen Klas can be reached at meklas@MiamiHerald.com and on Twitter @MaryEllenKlas

Offended panel approves new district maps

The Florida House Redistricting Committee approved new maps for state House and Senate and Congressional districts this morning...but as Rick Stone reports, not without some fireworks.

[Listen now](#)

The committee spent much of the morning adjusting boundary lines to make sure that as many cities and counties as possible were kept intact in single districts. That's one of the requirements of the Fair Districts amendments that voters approved to reduce gerrymandering.

Hours before, committee chairman Will Weatherford got a 12-page letter from the League of Women Voters and two other organizations, accusing the committee of violating Fair Districts to preserve Republican dominance. When the league's lobbyist, who was seated among the spectators, refused to explain the letter, Weatherford hit the roof.

Frankly I find it disappointing that anyone would suggest, first calling our maps, in a derogatory manner, explaining they don't follow the letter of the law and then refusing to get up and explain to us how theirs does..

The League -- along with Common Cause and the National Council of LaRaza -- did include maps of its own which Weatherford proposed as amendments. The committee rejected them unanimously. But committee Democrats all voted no on the final work product. Representative Evan Jenne of Broward County said the maps do not reflect Florida's reality.

Floridians are pretty much 50-50 when it comes to their voter registration. And at the end of the day I think you will still see a very strong Republican majority.

The new district maps are now ready for a House floor vote next week. Similar maps are coming up through the Senate.

[Rick Stone](#)

House committee slaps down Fair Districts plan, blasts its 11th-hour critique

The House Redistricting Committee forcefully pushed back against a blistering critique of their redistricting maps from the Fair Districts group that proposed the new standards and Friday rejected the group's alternative maps before passing three of its own.

"I think it's an unfortunate and more likely a legal stunt that this has taken, and I frankly find it offensive personally," said Rep. **Will Weatherford**, R-Wesley Chapel, chairman of the committee, referring to a 12-page letter sent by the coalition of voters groups.

Despite his disappointment, Weatherford offered the maps for the House and congressional districts submitted jointly by the League of Women Voters, La Raza and Common Cause as an alternative to the committee's staff-drawn maps -- [which result in at least 38 lawmakers pitted against each other](#).

With the amendment teed up, the committee then roundly beat up on it, with Democrats joining Republicans to kill it. Weatherford even urged his colleagues to oppose his own amendment.

"A lot of people predicted there would be a January surprise within this House," Weatherford said, referring to the presumption that many legislators wouldn't stand to have so many incumbents pitted against each other. But, he said, "little did we know that not only did we stay the course...but that the January surprise would come from the very organization that told us that they didn't think we would be transparent or follow the law. So, the January surprise has come from them."

The coalition had submitted the maps earlier this week and were asked by Weatherford to appear before the committee to defend and explain them. Instead, [the coalition sent the committee a 12-page letter](#) that accused legislators of strategically protecting incumbents, picking favorites in competitive areas, packing minority voters into districts and strategically securing a Republican majority for the next decade.

"Although we have only had a day to analyze the Committee's latest Congressional and House maps, it appears that they, like previous submissions and like those passed by the Senate do not comply with the FairDistricts Amendments," wrote **Deirdre Macnab** of the League of Women Voters, **Eric Rodriguez** of the Council of La Raza and **Peter Butzin** with Common Cause of Florida.

Rep. **Eric Eisnaugle**, R-Orlando, noted that absent from the letter was any indication that several members of the legislature had been drawn into the same district. For example, Eisnaugle is pitted against Rep. **Steve Precourt** under the new map, he said. "And yet this letter fails to even put it in a footnote. I find it disingenuous. I find the amendment disingenuous."

Rep. **Ritch Workman**, R-Melbourne, said that the concept of nesting House districts within Senate districts, advanced by the coalition, violates the goal of protecting minority strength and will make it difficult to elect Hispanics. "I find it insulting," he said.

Rep. **Mack Bernard**, D-West Palm Beach, also said he would vote against the map since he didn't have time to review it.

Rep. **Chris Dorworth**, R-Lake Mary, questioned the source of the maps and whether they were from "operatives for one political party."

"Instead, what we see today is a map, a half hearted explanation and a refusal to address it at all," he said.

Finally, Rep. **John Legg**, R-Tampa, blasted the coalition maps as violation the standards of compactness. "My three year old could draw something a little bit more compact than that," he said. "That is anything but compact."

The committee unanimously rejected all of the maps, then voted along party lines to advance the maps to the House floor next Thursday. House and Senate leaders have agreed to give final approval to the proposals next week so the Legislative redistricting maps can be submitted to the Florida Supreme Court next week for its 30-day review.

At the end, Rep. Darryl Rouson, D-St. Petersburg, chastised the behavior of some lawmakers that criticized the coalition's effort as a childish effort. "Attack the policy; attack the process," he said. "Leave the pejoratives out."

-- *Dave Decamp and Mary Ellen Klas*

Redistricting maps cut Matlacha in two

LEE COUNTY, FL -

Some Matlacha residents say they won't have a voice if redistricting maps don't change. The Florida House version of the redistricting maps cut Matlacha into two different districts.

The boundary would be Matlacha Pass.

Everything west of the bridge would be in a district with the barrier islands, District 76.

Everything east of the bridge would be in Cape Coral's legislative district, District 77.

Neighborhoods like Matlacha Isles and Matlacha Shores would be represented by Cape Coral's legislator. Many say their interests are too different.

"The amendments require that you follow, that you consider both geographical and political lines, they did the geographical but they ignored the political. In fact, they cut good old Matlacha right down the middle," said Matlacha resident Phil Buchanan.

Residents of Matlacha Isles also fear Cape Coral would annex their neighborhood. The redistricting maps could make that process easier.

Cape Coral city leaders say there are no plans to annex any more land.

Senate panel approves Florida redistricting maps | tallahassee

BILL KACZOR / The Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE — Senate and congressional redistricting maps won committee approval on Wednesday, buoyed by the unanimous support of Republican lawmakers. Democrats were sharply split, but the GOP has solid majorities in both Florida legislative chambers.

The votes in the Senate Reapportionment Committee were a prelude to floor action in that chamber next week on its plans for the 40 Senate and 27 congressional districts. The 120-member House is moving a bit slower with final committee action expected late next week on maps for itself and Congress.

Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich of Weston withdrew her proposals for changes in both maps after getting opposition from some of her own members. Rich said she'd offer revised versions when floor debate begins Tuesday. She said she didn't expect those changes to be drastic.

Regardless, they are unlikely to be adopted if the committee votes are any indication although her proposals might come into play in potential court challenges.

"It appears to me that there are some parts of these maps that can be improved to ensure that we are complying with the standards in our constitution," Rich told the panel.

Rich contends the committee-sponsored plans would violate a pair of amendments that voters adopted in 2010. They prohibit gerrymandering intended to benefit incumbents or political parties while also protecting the ability of racial and language minorities to elect candidates of their choice. Amendments 5 and 6, as well, require lines to follow city, county and geographic boundaries when possible.

The new district lines also must comply with the federal Voting Rights Act and undergo Justice Department or court review because of past racial discrimination in five of Florida's 67 counties.

Rich drew her plans without consulting other senators, which she said would have violated amendments, but she did get help from the Florida Democratic Party. When questioned whether that might violate the amendments, Rich said Senate Democrats lack staff support and asked "who drew the Republican map?"

Her maps would have reduced some of the large percentages of voting age blacks in several districts — what critics call "packing" — that now are represented by African American Democrats while leaving enough for most to keep their black-majority or minority-access status. They also would have moved some of those Democratic-voting blacks to what now are Republican districts, making them more competitive, while creating a new black-majority Senate district in Palm Beach County.

Sen. Larcenia Bullard, a black Democrat from Miami, was outspoken in her opposition to Rich's proposal.

"This would have clearly diminished the ability for African Americans to be elected to office," Bullard said.

Her district currently has only a 29 percent black voting age population, but Rich's plan would have given it a Hispanic majority. Rich said it's simply a result of changing demographics in that area.

While Bullard will be term-limited out of office this year, her son, Rep. Dwight Bullard, D-Miami, is running to succeed her.

Rich's plan also would have dropped the black voting age population of U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown's district to 36 percent compared to 50 percent in the committee's proposal.

To get that high of a percentage, though, District 3 would have to remain relatively unchanged from its present long, narrow configuration, snaking nearly 150 miles from Jacksonville to Orlando.

Brown is one of three black Democrats in Florida's congressional delegation. Rich's plan also would have dropped U.S. Rep Alcee Hastings' district to 48.5 percent black voting age population compared to 51.8 percent in the committee proposal. U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson's district would be about 56 percent under either plan. Both are in South Florida.

The committee voted 21-5 for the congressional map (SB 1174) with Democrats split 5-5. The vote was 22-4 for the Senate plan (SJR 1176) with Democrats favoring it 6-4.

Legislative leaders have agreed the House will accept the Senate's map for its own districts and vice-versa. The chambers, though, would have to negotiate any differences over the congressional map.

What about Cliff?

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New congressional districts leave Rep. Stearns looking for a place to run

By [Bill Thompson](#)
Staff writer

Published: Friday, February 3, 2012 at 7:30 p.m.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns might be undecided about what House seat he will seek in the fall. But another lawmaker representing part of Marion County is sure which new congressional district he wants to represent — and Stearns might end up his constituent.

The Florida House on Friday voted 80-37 along party lines to adopt the map establishing congressional boundaries for the next decade.

The proposal will be taken up by the state Senate next week.

While senators could change the plan before, House and Senate leaders had agreed to go by the House's lines, said state Rep. Dennis Baxley, a member of the House redistricting committee.

"That represents the consensus" on congressional districts, Baxley said of the House plan approved Friday.

If the Senate follows through, Stearns, an Ocala Republican and a 23-year veteran of Congress, would have to challenge a fellow Republican to represent the district he lives in, or pick another district nearby.

The House plan creates District 11, which in Marion County encompasses the city of Ocala, the State Road 200 corridor and the bulk of Marion County east of Interstate 75 — including the subdivision Stearns lives in.

That section of Marion would be married to all of Citrus, Hernando and Sumter counties and The Villages in Lake.

Freshman U.S. Rep. Rich Nugent, a Brooksville Republican who now represents part of western Marion, announced his re-election bid last week after the House redistricting committee approved the map that passed on Friday.

"The maps are left up to the Florida Legislature and that's the way it should be," Nugent said in a statement.

"As it turned out, I currently represent about 60 percent of the newly drawn 11th District — all of Citrus, all of Sumter, all of my home county of Hernando, part of Lake and part of Marion. That's where I'm running. There is no getting around it."

Stearns told the Star-Banner on Thursday that he would talk to his supporters across the region and get their input before making a decision about which district he would run in.

He noted that the Florida House plan created a district — the 3rd District — that contained about 70 percent of his current constituents.

The 6th District that Stearns now represents runs from Leesburg up to Gilchrist County — immediately west of Alachua County — and turns northeast through Gainesville over to Jacksonville.

The new 3rd District sprawls across the western portion of Marion and Alachua counties as well as all of Gilchrist and Bradford counties, which are in the current 6th District, and carries through North Central Florida all the way to the state line.

State Sen. Steve Oelrich, a Cross Creek Republican and former Alachua County sheriff who now represents

much of northern Marion in the Legislature, has filed to run in the new 3rd District.

Stearns added in his comments Thursday that no matter where he decides to run, he would continue to represent Marion County's interests, if re-elected.

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives do not have to live in the district they represent. The U.S. Constitution only requires that a representative be at least 25 years old, a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and a resident of the state that he or she represents.

The state cannot legally impose further residential restrictions.

Baxley said in an interview before Friday's vote that lawmakers had spent considerable time ensuring their plan complied with federal laws and state mandates, such as the so-called Fair Districts state constitutional amendments that voters approved in 2010.

"We really had to steer away from what might benefit incumbents and meet the requirements for compliance — and let the chips fall where they may," Baxley said.

"Our job is not to protect incumbents. Our job is to draw a map that meets fairness and compactness — a map that is defensible and court-proof. That's our top priority."

Despite that, some Democrats took to the House floor on Friday to denounce the plan as a plot to guarantee Republican control of Florida's political landscape — a charge GOP members adamantly denied.

"When you hear all the stories in the media, even from the likes of Rush Limbaugh, and the blogs and so forth about the inconvenient realities of what happens when you draw more compact districts that adhere to our city and county lines you have this outcry. And it makes it clear there was no political intent involved," Rep. Richard Corcoran, R-New Port Richey, said during the floor debate.

"And the fact is that the potential impacts of these maps have affected Republicans and Democrats."

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House panel approves Florida redistricting plans

By BILL KACZOR

The Associated Press

Updated: 5:36 p.m. Friday, Jan. 27, 2012

Posted: 3:06 a.m. Friday, Jan. 27, 2012

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Three groups that backed Florida's new anti-gerrymandering constitutional amendments say redistricting maps that cleared a House committee on Friday will perpetuate Republican legislative and congressional dominance in a state that's almost evenly divided between the two major parties.

House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, a Wesley Chapel Republican, denied the maps were drawn to favor the GOP and threw the allegation back at the Fair District coalition groups.

He said he was disappointed they would criticize the Legislature's maps yet refuse to appear before his committee to defend their own proposals, which the panel unanimously rejected before taking final action.

"It's a frankly unfortunate political, and more likely probably a legal, stunt," Weatherford said.

The committee approved its maps on party line votes, Republicans for and Democrats against.

"There's two things that make Tallahassee go around," said Democratic Rep. Evan Jenne of Dania Beach. "One is money and the other is partisanship, and this is 100 percent partisanship."

Floor debate will begin next Thursday with final action the following day, Weatherford said.

The Senate already has approved maps for its 40 districts and the state's 27 congressional seats. The panel accepted the Senate-passed map for its chamber. The Senate likewise intends to accept the House-drawn map for that chamber's 120 districts.

The committee also agreed to a proposed compromise on the congressional map. Weatherford said he's confident the Senate will accept it.

While the Florida League of Women Voters, National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida declined to testify, the Fair District advocates submitted an 11-page letter. It outlines their proposals and why they believe the Legislature's maps violate the two state constitutional amendment voters adopted in 2010.

Both Fair Districts amendments, one each covering the legislature and Congress, prohibit intentionally drawing districts to favor or disfavor incumbents or a political party. They also protect the rights of minorities to elect representatives of their choosing and require districts to be compact and use existing political and geographical boundaries where feasible.

The letter says the Legislature's maps "promise to perpetuate a system of one-party control in Florida in clear violation of the Florida Constitution." The Fair District groups also contend the maps miss the mark by protecting incumbents.

Republicans denied those allegations.

"I've never looked at political data on what the map does," Weatherford said. "I still couldn't tell you what the political implications are."

He also cited media reports indicating the committee's House map would place nearly a third of current members out of their existing districts or pair them against another incumbent.

The congressional compromise as well would displace a few incumbents from existing districts but unlike legislators, they are not required to live in their districts. The Senate map, though, does not double up or displace incumbents except for a couple who cannot seek re-election due to term limits.

The letter contends the House and Senate congressional maps each have 14 safe Republican seats and only seven safe Democratic seats. The rest are competitive but most also lean Republican, the groups say.

Republicans currently hold 19 congressional seats and Democrats only six. The new maps add two more seats to bring Florida's total to 27 because of population gains.

The groups predict the maps will enable Republicans to win two to three times as many congressional seats as Democrats and twice as many seats in the state House and Senate.

They allege the maps continue to put large percentages of Democrats including minorities into a relatively small number of districts to give Republicans a better chance of winning the others although by narrower margins.

The groups' own proposals included a plan to "nest" three state House districts in each Senate district. Their maps also would have reduced the percentages of minorities in certain districts, notably one now held by U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, a black Democrat from Jacksonville. Blacks currently make up slightly less than 50 percent of the voting age population in Brown's district that snakes from Jacksonville to Orlando. The House map would increase that to 50.05 percent while the Fair Districts backers' plan would cut it to 35 percent.

The letter argues the lower percentage would be sufficient for a black to win a Democratic primary and then the general election in a Democratic-heavy district.

House lawyer George Meros told the panel that much of a reduction in black voting strength would violate both the Florida Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act.

Once lawmakers pass the plans, the legislative maps go to the Florida Supreme Court and the congressional plan to Gov. Rick Scott.

Then all the maps must obtain preclearance from the U.S. Justice Department or a federal court to determine if they comply with the Voting Rights Act.

January 27, 2012 05:36 PM EST

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House poised to OK new redistricting maps; Democrats ready for court

Redrawn legislative and congressional district maps, which Democrats say will unfairly maintain Florida's Republican dominance, are readied for a final vote Friday in the state House.

Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford**, R-Wesley Chapel, withstood hours of questioning Thursday from Democrats. He denied that new electoral boundaries were drawn to help or hurt incumbents, or assure that Republicans retain control of the Legislature or congressional delegation.

"At no point, were these maps drawn with any political intent," Weatherford said.

But the Democrats are clearly looking to build a legal case against the maps, which must be reviewed by the state Supreme Court and the U.S. Justice Department, to assure minority-voting rights are protected.

The House is poised to vote Friday, sending the plans back to the Senate for final action, probably next week. The courts would then begin their work.

Here's the rest of the story: <http://bit.ly/yaNwA4>

Tags: [Florida Supreme Court](#), [Rep. Will Weatherford](#)

This entry was posted on Friday, February 3rd, 2012 at 10:25 am and is filed under [2012 campaigns](#), [Democrats](#), [redistricting](#), [Republicans](#), [State House](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

Rush Limbaugh Is Wrong

As a longtime fan and admirer of Rush Limbaugh, I was disappointed to hear his comments regarding the work of the Congressional Redistricting Subcommittee on which I am honored to serve.

His suggestions that we “rigged” the maps to force Allen West out of Congress are simply ludicrous. I was there ... it didn’t happen ... I know. It is especially surprising to see Mr. Limbaugh join with the chorus of left-wing groups attacking our work.

I can only presume that Mr. Limbaugh’s lack of knowledge of our process, laws and constitution would lead him to make such statements and would lead him to take these kinds of cheap shots at Rep. Will Weatherford and the work of our committee. Here are the facts:

- The Legislature did not target members of Congress, the House or Senate, that support the principles of the tea party movement. As a member of the Congressional Redistricting Subcommittee where the maps were first approved, I have firsthand knowledge of the process and can state this fact unequivocally.
- Under the standards approved by a supermajority of Florida voters, it is literally unconstitutional for the Legislature to favor or disfavor Congressman West or any other incumbent when drawing new districts. It has been reported that 38 members of the Florida House are either drawn out of their district or are living in the same district as another incumbent. If we were “rigging” the results, we were certainly not very good at it. In fact, the House district that I currently hold has been eliminated. If this stands, I will likely have to run against another incumbent, move or leave the Legislature ... all rather unpleasant choices.
- The proposed map which changes Congressman West's district is the direct result of a constitutional amendment that I, and many other members, opposed and campaigned against. However, 63 percent of Florida voters spoke loudly and clearly last November when they voted “yes” to what were called the “Fair Districts” amendments ... Amendments 5 and 6. Rep. Weatherford took an oath to “protect and defend the Constitution and government of the United States and of the state of Florida.” He is now duty-bound to uphold these amendments. Our maps clearly reflect this.
- We conducted 26 meetings across the state where thousands of citizens had the opportunity to attend and testify. It is obvious that we have put forth the most open and transparent redistricting process in the history of our state. In one of our committee meetings, I asserted that it is likely the most open and transparent process of any state in the history of the United States. No one disagreed.
- By drawing districts that comply with the Florida Constitution, as we clearly have done, we ensure that the unelected members of the state Supreme Court will not be able to take over the process and draw their own maps behind closed doors and out of the sight of the public.

I was the only Florida legislator to endorse Herman Cain (when he was at 5 percent in the polls) before Sept. 24, the day he won Presidency 5 and started his climb in the polls. Last week I endorsed Rick Santorum. I’ve filed and/or passed the Health Care Freedom Amendment, the red-light camera repeal, the cap-and-trade repeal, etc., etc. I don’t think that I’ve ever been accused of being an “establishment Republican”!

But when someone of the character, integrity, impeccable reputation and conservative values of Rep. Weatherford is accused like this based on unproven speculation and conspiracy theories, I feel that I need to say something ... even if it is Rush Limbaugh making those accusations.

I’ve read that Congressman West will still run for Congress, and I firmly hope and believe that he will be elected by Florida voters. He is a hero to our country and our cause.

It goes to show you that even America’s Anchorman, Truth Detector and Doctor of Democracy, who is at the cutting edge of societal evolution that can beat the liberals with half his brain tied behind his back, can actually get one wrong.

I guess there is a first time for everything.

Rep. Scott Plakon, R-Longwood, is a member of the Congressional Redistricting Subcommittee of the Florida House of Representatives.

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The Fair Districts coalition has declined to attend Friday's House Redistricting Committee workshop, where Chairman Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said he plans to discuss changes proposed by the group to the boundary lines now under review.

The Fair Districts coalition has declined to attend Friday's House Redistricting Committee workshop, where Chairman Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said he plans to discuss changes proposed by the group to the boundary lines now under review.

Weatherford said Friday that he filed the changes proposed by the coalition, which was behind the voter-approved Fair Districts amendments in 2010, as a courtesy to the group.

"If you have a way to make these maps more legally appropriate or compliant, we certainly want to give your ideas a fair consideration," Weatherford said at the start of Friday's redistricting workshop.

In a 12-page letter to Weatherford on Thursday, the coalition -- made up of the League of Women Voters, the National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida -- stated that their proposals comply with the Fair Districts amendments, while those under consideration by the committee and already approved by the Senate fail to comply with the wishes of the voters.

"Although we have only had a day to analyze the committee's latest congressional and House maps, it appears that they, like previous submissions and like those passed by the Senate, do not comply with the Fair Districts amendments," the coalition stated. "Specifically, it appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents."

The coalition goes on to state that the Legislature's proposals fail to use geographic boundaries, where feasible, as is mandated by the amendments.

"Moreover, our districts contain far more whole counties and whole cities than do the Legislature's proposed maps," the coalition continued.

The Fair Districts amendments that voters approved prohibit lawmakers from drawing legislative and congressional lines that favor any incumbent or political party, keep counties and cities within a single district whenever possible, and protect minority voting strengths.

The Senate is expected to approve the House proposals. The Florida Supreme Court would then have 30 days to review the maps before they are presented to the governor.

The House maps being focused on Friday are: [HB 6005](#) for the new congressional lines, [HJR 6001](#) for the new Senate borders, and [HJR 6011](#) for the changes to the House districts.

House Rejects 'January Surprise' from Fair Districts Coalition on Voting Maps

[House Redistricting Committee](#) members strongly rejected last-minute remapping efforts offered by the group behind the voter-approved method to reduce political gerrymandering as new congressional and legislative lines were pushed forward on Friday.

Committee members, whose proposals now head to a full floor vote next week, criticized the offerings from the Fair Districts coalition, saying the group has been noticeably absent since the Legislature conducted a statewide tour last summer to gather input on the once-a-decade redistricting based upon the changes required in Amendments 5 and 6.

Rep. Chris Dorworth, R-Heathrow, called it frustrating that the group accusing them of not being transparent, submitted maps 60 hours before the meeting.

The committee's legal consultants were even more critical, claiming the coalition's maps would reduce minority representation and violate the 2010 voter-supported amendments, which prohibit lawmakers from drawing state [House](#) , [Senate](#) and [congressional](#) lines that favor any incumbent or political party, keep counties and cities within a single district whenever possible, and protect minority voting strengths.

Committee Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said he agreed, as a courtesy, to submit the map proposals from the coalition to the committee. He had received the coalition maps earlier in the week.



Will WeatherfordHide

Around the State

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The coalition -- comprised of the League of Women Voters, the National Council of La Raza and Common Cause of Florida -- had a lobbyist at the meeting, but declined to participate in the workshop.

In a 12-page letter to Weatherford on Thursday, the coalition stated that their proposals comply with the Fair Districts amendments, while those under consideration by the committee and already approved by the Senate fail to comply with the wishes of the voters.

"Although we have only had a day to analyze the committee's latest congressional and House maps, it appears that they, like previous submissions and like those passed by the Senate, do not comply with the Fair Districts amendments," the coalition stated in the letter.

"Specifically, it appears that all maps under consideration were drawn with an intent to gain partisan advantage and/or to protect incumbents."

The coalition, which has accused legislators of favoring incumbents and ignoring public input since before last summer's statewide workshop, goes on to claim that the Legislature's proposals fail to use geographic boundaries where feasible, as is mandated by the amendments.

"Moreover, our districts contain far more whole counties and whole cities than do the Legislature's proposed maps," the coalition continued.

Weatherford called the coalition's map proposals a "January surprise."

"When we first put out our maps, people recognized the amount of incumbents that would be running against each other. Many members within this room did not believe these were going to be the real maps; they thought surely members would not draw maps that would take themselves out of their districts," Weatherford said.

"They thought surely there'll be some January surprise or February surprise that would come into the process and will save everyone.

"Little did we know that not only were we going to stay the course and do what we said we were going to do since March (2011), that the January surprise would come from the very organization that told us that they didn't think we'd be transparent or open; or that we wouldn't follow the law."

Redistricting boots Mortell from state House race »

TCPalm.com

Eve Samples' blog

Former Stuart city commissioner [Mike Mortell](#) is unofficially out of the District 82 state House race — before his campaign ever heated up.

Once-a-decade redistricting maps approved Friday by a House committee put the district's new boundaries well south of Mortell's home, and the longtime Stuart resident said he's not willing to move to stay in the race.

"I'm out," the civil lawyer told me Monday. "I am no longer running for state representative ... unless they somehow carve the Mike Mortell hole in that district."

He was kidding about that last part (which would blatantly defy the voter-approved Fair Districts amendments anyway). But he was serious about the end of his campaign.

The full House is expected to approve the revised boundaries for state House, state Senate and Congress next week.

Once that happens, Mortell will be solidly in District 83, where incumbent [Gayle Harrell](#) will be running for re-election.

Beyond booting a strong Stuart contender from the race for District 82 (which Republican Rep. William Synder is leaving to run for sheriff), what will the new boundaries mean for Martin County residents?

First, the good news.

The new districts are more compact and intuitive than the old ones, so voters will have an easier time knowing their representative. (Simplicity is vital in a country where 45 percent of adults don't know each state elects two U.S. senators.)

Today, Harrell's district meanders from Jensen Beach to White City, across part of Port St. Lucie and down to Indiantown.

When the new districts are approved, District 83 will be more rectangular. It will encompass the entire city of Stuart — not the case when the district maps were first released. That's more good news.

Now, for the bad news.

Because no part of Stuart will be included in District 82 — and because the growing Palm Beach County town of Jupiter will be in it — there's a chance that Martin County's power will be diluted over time.

It's safe to bet that northern Palm Beach County will grow at a faster rate than Martin County in the next decade. That could mean Martin County's margin slims.

The same could happen as Port St. Lucie grows in District 83.

Another potential drawback: Palm City is divided into two districts along Martin Downs Boulevard. But that's the case now, too.

Snyder said he would have preferred for Martin County to encompass its own district, but logistics did not allow it.

"There was just this tremendous amount of pressure, so some places like Martin County lost a little bit in the process," Snyder said.

Harrell pointed out that there's an advantage to having multiple representatives from a county, "as long as they are attuned to the interest of the county."

At best, redistricting is a frustrating exercise in dividing Florida's 18 million residents into 120 House seats, 40 Senate seats and 27 congressional seats.

At worst, it is a thinly veiled act of gerrymandering to protect political parties and incumbents.

While there are signs that lawmakers attempted to adhere to Fair Districts this year (after all, dozens of incumbents in the House will be vulnerable under the new plan), the boundaries are not perfect.

Backers of the Fair Districts amendments (including the League of Women Voters) outlined objections to them last week in a 12-page letter.

Among their complaints was the fact that State Sen. Joe Negron, R-Stuart, will no longer run in District 28, which merely leaned Republican. His new District 25 will be a Republican stronghold.

The Fair Districts group had asked lawmakers to consider their proposal to "nest" House districts within state Senate districts, giving voters a more logical representation. That didn't happen.

As for Mortell, he said he's disappointed to be out of the District 82 race, but he believes things "happen for a reason."

His competitors remain in: Tequesta Village Councilman Calvin Turnquest; Martin County Republican Executive Committee state committeewoman Mary-Lynn Magar; former House Rep. Carl Domino, R-Jupiter; Martin County firefighter Jon Pasqualone; and engineering consultant Jonathan W. Milton.

Eve Samples is a columnist for Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers. This column reflects her opinion. For more on Martin County topics, follow her blog at [TCPalm.com/samples](https://www.tcpalm.com/samples). Contact her at 772-221-4217 or eve.samples@scripps.com.



Redistricting plan changing Indian River County map passes Florida House » TCPalm.com

TALLAHASSEE — Maps that could shake up the next decade's legislative and congressional representation passed the House on Friday, and Indian River County would have a single congressman, two senators and one House representative in GOP-heavy districts if those lines withstand court reviews.

Amid opposition from Democrats and fair district amendment advocates, the House passed plans to chop up the state into new House, Senate and congressional districts based on 2010 U.S. Census changes, minority representation rules and anti-gerrymandering requirements. Each plan passed on a party-line 80-37 margin.

Next week the maps get shipped back to the Senate, where senators already passed proposals that agree with their rival chamber on state legislative lines, but they have a few kinks to work out for Florida's seats in Congress. [Gov. Rick Scott](#) only has to sign off on the maps for Congress. Then it's off to the courts for final review.

The bottom line for Indian River County residents — they would maintain one congressional seat that gets more Brevard County-heavy, two state senators will generally divide voter bases east and west along Interstate 95, and one state House seat would include all of Indian River with a sliver of northern St. Lucie.

At the congressional level, Indian River's voters already are kept together in a seat held by U.S. Rep. Bill Posey, R-Rockledge. Posey would likely seek re-election in a similarly Republican-strong seat — a proposed 9-point GOP edge over Democrats — but it'll more Brevard County top-heavy. Brevard now holds 54 percent, Osceola has 24 percent, Indian River has 18 percent and Polk makes up the rest of District 15 voters registered for the 2012 elections.

In the proposed district, Brevard boosts up to 78 percent and Indian River has 20 percent of voting-age residents. A tiny slice of Orange County makes up the rest.

From Indian River down to northern Palm Beach County, one state Senate seat would grab just about all voters east of I-95, except where I-95 goes west of Florida's Turnpike and a chunk of northern Indian River. The strong Republican seat is Stuart Republican [Sen. Joe Negron](#)'s to lose.

Indian River communities west of I-95 would be in Senate President Mike Haridopolos' district, which loses a lot of ground in the county to the incumbent Negron seat. Haridopolos, R-Merritt Island, has hit his term limits, but no one has announced a run for his seat yet. His proposed district also would get Sebastian east of the barrier island, in addition to most of Brevard.

Negron and Haridopolos share Indian River in the Senate as it stands today.

The House lines up another seat that almost solely includes Indian River voters. Rep. Debbie Mayfield, R-Vero Beach, would be the incumbent in a district that includes all of Indian River and about 15,000 voters from the northernmost tip of St. Lucie County from the Fort Pierce Inlet north, extending from just east of U.S. 1 out west to the county line. That seat is a GOP stronghold featuring a 15-point edge over Democrats, according to the Orlando Sentinel analysis.

Democrats hold a 500,000-person edge in voter registration, but Republicans hold two-thirds majorities in the Legislature and 19 of the state's 25 congressional districts. That prompted Democratic skepticism of redistricting plans, to which Republicans pointed out up to a third of House members are drawn into district with other current members.

Leaders of the Florida League of Women Voters, National Council of La Raza and Common Cause Florida said all three maps would give the GOP a 2-to-1 advantage in representation.

The Associated Press and Palm Beach Post contributed to this story.

House OKs redistricting plan that would alter Martin County's legislative landscape » TCPalm.com

TALLAHASSEE — Maps that could shake up the next decade's legislative and congressional representation passed the House on Friday, and Martin County would have one congressman, two senators and two House representatives if those lines withstand court reviews.

Amid opposition from Democrats and fair district amendment advocates, the House passed plans to chop up the state into new House, Senate and congressional districts based on 2010 U.S. Census changes, minority representation rules and anti-gerrymandering requirements. Each plan passed on a party-line 80-37 margin.

Next week the maps get shipped back to the Senate, where senators already passed proposals that agree with their rival chamber on state legislative lines, but they have a few kinks to work out for Florida's seats in Congress. [Gov. Rick Scott](#) only has to sign off on maps for Congress. Then it's off to the courts for final review.

The bottom line for Martin County residents — they would maintain one congressional seat that's much more condensed, two senators will generally divide voter bases east and west along Interstate 95, and two House seats would split Stuart and half of Palm City from the rest of the county.

At the congressional level, voters already are seeing a big shake-up based on the proposed district layout. U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, R-Tequesta, is out of running on the Treasure Coast for a more rural district to the west, and U.S. Rep. Allen West is in. West, R-Plantation, will vie to represent Martin and St. Lucie counties. The new district would also have a chunk of northern Palm Beach County, but the two Treasure Coast counties' voters combined would outweigh Palm Beach, 60 to 40 percent.

That's a big shift from the Charlotte-to-Martin County district Rooney currently represents. The district also gets a little more blue, just about evenly splitting Democrats and Republicans.

From Indian River down to northern Palm Beach County, one state Senate seat would grab just about all voters east of I-95, except where I-95 goes west of Florida's Turnpike, and a chunk of northwestern Indian River. The strong Republican seat is Stuart Republican Sen. Joe Negron's to lose.

St. Lucie and Martin communities west of that district would join a massive nine-county rural district jetting out to DeSoto County. The district has a five-point edge for Democrats, but Gov. Rick Scott beat Democrat Alex Sink by 10 points in 2010 among those voters, according to an Orlando Sentinel analysis.

Negron currently covers all of Martin County.

The House splits Martin twice: east of the turnpike and north of Martin Downs Boulevard, including all of Stuart and half of Palm City, joins a St. Lucie-majority district to the north; the rest of Martin, including Palm City's southern half and Indiantown, would join Palm Beach County east of I-95 almost down to Juno Beach.

County officials asked the House Redistricting Committee for all of Palm City to be in one district, and for Stuart to end up in the southern seat, but those changes didn't happen. The breakdown of the highly Republican seat gives Martin a smaller voter edge — 57 to 43 percent — over Palm Beach than it currently has.

The seat that Rep. William Snyder, R-Stuart, will vacate to run for Martin County sheriff would likely lose one contender from the six who have announced. Former city of Stuart Commissioner Mike Mortell would live in the northern proposed district that includes incumbent Rep. Gayle Harrell, R-Stuart.

Democrats hold a 500,000-person edge in voter registration, but Republicans hold two-thirds majorities in the Legislature and 19 of the state's 25 congressional districts. That prompted Democratic skepticism of redistricting plans, to which Republicans pointed out up to a third of House members are drawn into districts with other current members.

Leaders of the Florida League of Women Voters, National Council of La Raza and Common Cause Florida said all three maps would give the GOP a 2-to-1 advantage in representation.

The Associated Press and Palm Beach Post contributed to this story.

Compromise plan keeps Sarasota, Manatee in same district

By Jeremy Wallace, Herald-Tribune
Thursday, February 2, 2012

Under the plan poised to pass, all of Sarasota and most of Manatee County would be in one congressional district, which would be renumbered as the 16th District. The exception would be about 6,000 people living in Myakka City and extreme eastern Manatee. Those areas would be in a new 17th Congressional District, binding them with mostly rural farming communities in DeSoto, Hardee and Polk Counties.

All of Charlotte County would also be in the new 17th Congressional District. Passage of the revised maps is considered so certain that U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, a Palm Beach County Republican who has represented Charlotte since 2008, announced this week that he intends to move there to continue representing the area in Congress. Rooney's current district was cut in half in the current proposal, forcing him to decide whether to represent a more Palm Beach-oriented district, or move west to keep Charlotte.

The new maps are getting good reviews in Manatee County. Since 2002, the cores of Bradenton and Palmetto have been gerrymandered into a separate congressional district, split from the rest of Manatee and Sarasota, and represented by Tampa Democrat Kathy Castor.

Those areas, with about 30,000 people, have a voting-age population that is 40 percent black and nearly 30 percent Hispanic, according to statistics released by the Florida Legislature.

The district was drawn to preclude those voters from helping to elect a Democrat to represent Sarasota and Manatee counties.

But House and Senate leaders were barred from making such overtly gerrymandered districts this year because of a new state constitutional amendment passed in 2010 that requires district lines to be drawn fairly without regard to protecting political parties or incumbents.

State Rep. Doug Holder, R-Sarasota, said legislators have tried to closely follow the amendment, and have achieved the goal, particularly in the case of the Sarasota-Bradenton area.

The change removes nearly 90,000 people from heavily Republican-leaning Hardee, DeSoto and Charlotte counties, while adding nearly 30,000 people from solidly Democratic pockets of Manatee. Hardee and DeSoto counties have more registered Democrats than Republicans, but have voted reliably Republican since the early 1990s. A Democrat for Congress has not carried those counties since 1992. No Democratic presidential candidate has carried either county since 1980, when Jimmy Carter won Hardee County by two votes.

In three campaigns, Buchanan has never lost Hardee, DeSoto or Charlotte. But during the same time, the sections of Manatee County he will gain have voted overwhelming for Castor, a Democrat.

Holder said such partisan considerations were not part of the conversation in Tallahassee.

"We didn't look at party affiliations when we drew the lines," Holder said. "We drew the lines based on geography."

He said many elected officials will have to make "political adjustments, but that is just part of the process."

Buchanan's campaign team quickly called the changes to the current District 13 configuration a "victory." A statement sent for the campaign by former U.S. Rep. Dan Miller, a supporter of Buchanan's, called the redistricting a "tremendous boon" for the sitting congressman.

Miller said that because most of the new 16th District includes Sarasota and Manatee, areas Buchanan already represents, Buchanan will be in good shape.

Buchanan campaign spokeswoman Sally Tibbetts issued a statement saying that, had the new district lines been in place in 2010, Buchanan still would have easily won re-election against underfunded Democratic challenger James Golden. Buchanan would have received 68 percent of the vote in the footprint of the proposed new district.

That math assumes that the 3,149 votes that went to U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Tampa, in the 11th District would have gone to Golden had those parts of Bradenton and Palmetto been part of the 13th District.

But Democrats say a better example of potential problems for Buchanan is the 2006 election, when Buchanan defeated Sarasota Democrat Christine Jennings by just 369 votes.

If the proposed lines had been in effect then, with all of Bradenton and Palmetto included, Jennings would have won the district by more than 3,000 votes.

Buchanan's likely 2012 Democratic opponent, Keith Fitzgerald, downplayed the impact of the new lines, saying he only wants the Legislature to comply with the new constitutional amendment requiring more compact districts.

"We are very happy for the region that Sarasota and Manatee are contained within the same congressional district," Fitzgerald said.

The Legislature also is preparing to pass new boundary lines for the Florida House and Senate districts.

Those maps remain similar to maps proposed earlier.

In the Florida House, the biggest change would include putting State Reps. Ray Pilon and Holder into the same northern Sarasota-based district. Holder has already declared that he will move south into a new district made up mostly of North Port and Venice to avoid a confrontation with Pilon.

Also, Bradenton state Rep. Jim Boyd would see his district reach into downtown Sarasota and pick up St. Armands Circle.

In the Senate, Sen. Nancy Detert's current district would include all of Sarasota County and part of Charlotte.

In Manatee County, which is now represented mostly by Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton, the main Senate district would stretch into eastern Hillsborough and include part of Lakeland. Manatee would still have the bulk of the district's population — about 60 percent.

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Compromise plan keeps Sarasota, Manatee in same district

By Jeremy Wallace, Herald-Tribune
Thursday, February 2, 2012

For the first time in more than a decade, all of Bradenton and Sarasota will be in one congressional district, under a compromise plan expected to quickly pass the Florida Legislature.

The new compromise map outlining Florida's congressional district boundaries could complicate U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan's re-election, with thousands of voters from Republican strongholds removed from his district and replaced by those in more Democratic areas.

The Florida House is expected to pass the plan on Friday. State senators say the same plan is likely to be approved by their chamber by the end of next week.

The measure would still need to be reviewed by the courts this spring to assure compliance with state and federal laws before the districts would be official and in effect for the 2012 election season.

In shifting to the new boundaries, the Legislature backed away from another proposal outlined just two weeks ago that would have split Manatee and Sarasota down Interstate 75 and put Lakewood Ranch and the rest of east Manatee into a district centered nearly 70 miles away.

"Ideally we wanted all of Manatee County to remain in one district," said Kathleen King, the Manatee County Republican Party chairwoman.

The political boundaries for state legislative and congressional districts are changing as a result of the once-a-decade reapportionment process, to reflect population changes found in the 2010 Census.

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Inside The Lines

Why redistricting doesn't matter...

From a new research paper in [PS: Political Science & Politics](#):

“Many reformers continue to argue for a de-politicization of the redistricting process, claiming that partisan redistricting is responsible for declining electoral competition and increasing legislative polarization. Our analysis of evidence from state legislatures during the last decade suggests that the effects of partisan redistricting on competition and polarization are small, considerably more nuanced than reformers would suggest, and overwhelmed by other aspects of the political environment.”

Category: [National HeadLINES](#)



Inside The Lines

Compromise plan keeps Sarasota, Manatee in same district

The new compromise map outlining Florida's congressional district boundaries could complicate U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan's re-election, with thousands of voters from Republican strongholds removed from his district and replaced by those in more Democratic areas, reports Jeremy Wallace of the *Herald-Tribune*.

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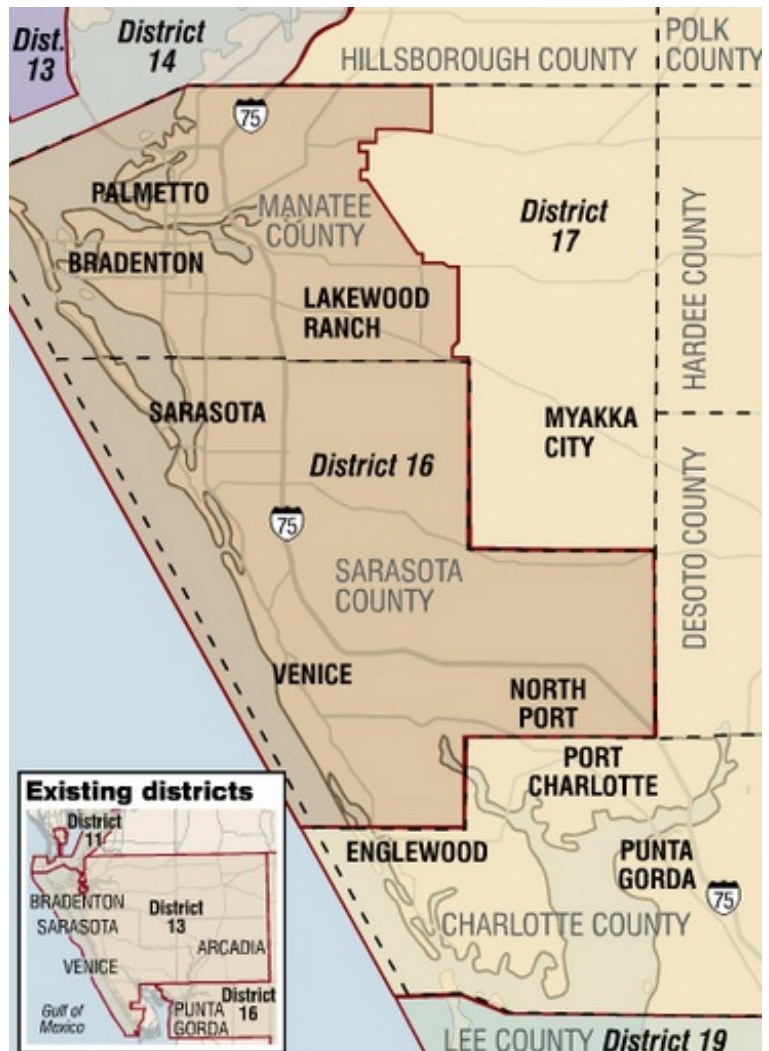
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Under the plan poised to pass, all of Sarasota and most of Manatee County would be in one congressional district, which would be renumbered as the 16th District. The exception would be about 6,000 people living in Myakka City and extreme eastern Manatee. Those areas would be in a new 17th Congressional District, binding them with mostly rural farming communities in DeSoto, Hardee and Polk Counties.

There's a lot more from Jeremy Wallace [here](#).

Category: [Maps](#), [Maps](#), [Maps](#)



Inside The Lines

House approves redistricting maps; process now moves to Senate, then courts

New districts for the House, Senate and the Florida congressional delegation passed the House on party-line votes Friday, all but clearing the way for looming legal battles over whether the plans follow state anti-gerrymandering standards and federal civil rights laws, reports Brandon Larrabee of the News Service of Florida.

The maps for the Legislature (SJR 1176) and Congress (SB 1174) were approved on twin 80-37 votes, sending them to the Senate for final vote that is expected to be a formality.

After that, the legislative plan will head to the Florida Supreme Court for its approval while the congressional proposal goes to Gov. Rick Scott. One or both maps are likely to face challenges under either state or federal laws.



Senate leaders have indicated they hope to take up the maps and approve the changes as soon as Tuesday.

In the meantime, Democrats hammered away at the maps as partisan measures that defied the anti-gerrymandering Fair Districts standards, approved by Florida voters in a referendum last year.

"We can do better than this," said Rep. Perry Thurston, a Plantation Democrat who served as his party's lead on redistricting. "The people of the state of Florida deserve better than this."

Republicans countered that the Democrats were trying to bolster the inevitable legal challenges while ignoring that the maps took scrupulous trouble to follow the new standards. The GOP pointed repeatedly to media reports indicating that 38 incumbents would be forced into districts with each other.

"If you're voting no simply because an attorney who is not a part of this process and a part of this chamber is telling you to vote no, that's wrong," said House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel.

For the most part, though, attention was already turning to the court battles shaping up over whether the maps follow the Fair Districts amendments. Democrats predicted that the Legislature would be forced to take another stab at drawing maps after those reviews.

"We have no doubt that the Florida courts will ultimately step in to protect the constitutional rights of every Floridian and throw out these maps," said Florida Democratic Party executive director Scott Arceneaux.

Already, Democrats were signaling the contours of the legal challenges the maps would face.

The Senate map is likely to come under fire for being extraordinarily helpful to the chamber's incumbents.

"It can't be just a coincidence that every one, every single one — not just most of them — every single one had a district that improved for their re-election chances," said House Minority Leader Ron Saunders, D-Key West. "When Amendment 5 specifically says you're not supposed to protect incumbents, I would at least think that's an issue."

House Democrats also argue that their chamber's map should more closely follow the partisan makeup of the state, where Democrats hold an edge in voter registration but Republicans hold an overwhelming advantage in the House, Senate and congressional delegation. In 2010, Gov. Rick Scott won 73 House districts under the new maps while his Democratic opponent won just 47.

But the GOP argued that elections were won on better ideas, and that attempts to arrange an even split in the chamber would have constituted the very gerrymandering that the Fair Districts amendments were meant to ban.

After the vote, House Speaker Dean Cannon was hesitant to address what steps the Legislature might take if the maps were thrown out by the courts. The House is already embroiled in a legal challenge to Amendment 6 — which governs congressional redistrict — though Cannon, R-Winter Park, said the chamber still followed the rules.

“I’m hopeful that the courts may approve them as passed,” Cannon said. “We don’t know. ... We’ll sort of cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Category: [Latest HeadLINES](#)

New political maps chalk up Tampa Bay winners, losers

Moving signs. Scuttled ambitions. Bolstered political careers.

The once-a-decade redistricting process has dashed the plans of some Tampa Bay lawmakers, and caused others to move their politicking to new neighborhoods to stay in power.

A few stand an even better chance to win, if the maps proposed by Florida lawmakers withstand court scrutiny.

"From my perspective I can tell you there are a half-dozen seats in Tampa Bay that I hate because they are going to be harder to win as a Republican than a month ago," Anthony Pedicini, a Republican consultant on legislative races, said of the effects of new Fair District restrictions on gerrymandering maps. "That never would have happened 10 years ago."

A look at some local winners and losers:

Loser: State Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey

Fasano's ambitions to run for Congress appear shot. Pasco voters would make up two-thirds of the new 12th Congressional District, which ordinarily would benefit the popular, longtime lawmaker. But Fasano's problem isn't voter demographics. (The district is solidly Republican.) The new map includes the home of an incumbent whose name is gold around these parts: Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor. Bilirakis' father, Mike Bilirakis, spent more than two decades in Washington, representing large portions of Pasco for much of that time.

Bilirakis plans to run for re-election, and Fasano said he doesn't plan to challenge him. Fasano also won't run for a district outside Pasco. Absent that, Fasano is eyeing a return to the state House in an open West Pasco district. He would work with powerful future House Speakers Will Weatherford of Wesley Chapel and Richard Corcoran of Trinity.

Winner: Senators seeking re-election

Sens. Jack Latvala, Arthenia Joyner and Jim Norman received lots of re-election help from the mapmakers. Latvala moves from a mid and southern Pinellas district to his old haunts (Senate District 17) from his past stint in the Senate, north Pinellas.

Joyner would continue to enjoy a heavily Democratic district (Senate 19) crossing Tampa Bay.

Norman kept a largely suburban, Republican district (Senate 15) with more Pasco voters, who might not remember investigations when he was a Hillsborough county commissioner.

A well-financed potential challenger, northeast Pasco egg farmer Wilton Simpson, landed in another district (Senate 11) to run for state Senate against Rep. John Legg, R-Port Richey.

Loser: U.S. Rep. Rich Nugent, R-Brooksville

The freshman congressman leaves a frying pan for the fire. Nugent avoided being drawn into a Pasco-centered map that could have paved the way for a challenge from Fasano.

Fasano was angry in 2010 when the former Hernando sheriff qualified at the last minute to replace Ginny Brown-Waite, who announced a surprise retirement. But the new map puts Nugent in the same district (11th Congressional District) as 12-term incumbent Cliff Stearns, R-Ocala, who has \$2.4 million on hand. Nugent's re-election effort, which has only \$165,000 on hand, is left to wait on whether Stearns runs against him or moves north, where many of the voters in Stearns' current district reside.

That could turn Nugent into a redistricting winner. If not, he faces an uphill battle against a longtime member of Congress.

Loser: state Rep. Rachel Burgin, R-Riverview

It's not a total loss. But relative to the safety other Hillsborough lawmakers could enjoy, the second-term House member's district changes politically — to her detriment.

She won elections in 2008 and 2010 with solidly Republican, suburban voters. Her new district (House 59) includes more Democrats — such as more residents from the Progress Village area — than Republicans.

Consider that voters there narrowly voted for Gov. Rick Scott in 2010, but even more narrowly supported President Barack Obama in 2008.

Other lawmakers, such as Rep. Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg, face Democratic-performing districts, but they have reputations for being less strictly conservative. Burgin is among lawmakers with bills restricting abortion this year.

Winner: Realtors

Thanks to redistricting, some members will move to keep seats in the Legislature.

Republican Reps. Larry Ahern, R-St. Petersburg, and James Grant, R-Tampa, intend to do just that.

Ahern, who represents a west Pinellas district, intends to downsize and move to a smaller house in a new district (House 66, which happens to include a chunk of his old seat). The new maps put him in the same district as Rep. Rick Kriseman, a Democrat who may run instead for St. Petersburg mayor in 2013, and Rep. Jim Frishe, R-St. Petersburg, who is running for state Senate District 22.

Grant and Rep. Shawn Harrison would land in the same north Hillsborough district. But Grant intends to find a place to live in a new district (House 64) due west (without an incumbent but with part of his current one). It runs from Citrus Park and Town 'N Country to Oldsmar, Safety Harbor and East Lake.

Their good fortune: They will be in districts that are solidly Republican. All told, at least 38 House members find themselves in districts with other incumbents.

Times news artist Darla Cameron contributed to this report. David DeCamp can be reached at ddecamp@tampabay.com. Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/DeCampTimes.

Florida voters' input key in drawing new district maps

By Will Weatherford, Special to the Times

Will Weatherford Tampa Bay Times In Print: Monday, February 6, 2012

Once every 10 years, the Florida Legislature is required to redraw maps for the House, Senate and congressional districts. Whether led by Democrats or Republicans, the result has always been the same: maps drawn taking into account the wishes of incumbents. It was a perfectly legal and generally tolerated practice — until this year.

As a result of two constitutional amendments passed by Florida voters, the Legislature was given new guidelines for drawing maps. Floridians spoke loud and clear. The first requirement was to ensure districts preserved the right of minorities to participate equally in the political process. Voters asked us to produce maps that did not favor incumbents and were drawn more compactly. They also asked, where feasible, to use existing city, county and geographical boundaries.

In its redistricting effort, the House Redistricting Committee undertook a deliberate effort to include Floridians in the process. From offering free mapping software to conducting public meetings around the state, we sought input from Floridians. More than 4,700 citizens attended our 26 statewide public meetings, and more than 1,600 appeared before the committee.

There were thousands of others who participated online via Facebook, Twitter, email and by watching the Florida Channel online. The committee received 300 written suggestions for redistricting maps and 177 public submissions of redistricting plans — up from only four in 2002. We also received more than 34,000 visitors to the redistricting website, 520 page likes on Facebook, 800 Twitter followers and sent out more than 1,700 informative updates. In Tallahassee, we held numerous committee and subcommittee meetings over the course of the last several months and considered several amendments that enhanced the maps and made them more legally compliant.

We produced maps that elevated the input of voters over the requests of politicians. In fact, as many as one-third of all House members currently share a district with an incumbent under the current House map. These changes impacted Republicans and Democrats alike. This is because drawing districts for specific members was not our goal. Our purpose was to follow state and federal laws and take partisanship out of the process.

The new maps embody the changes that voters wanted. Don't just take my word for it. One major newspaper described the new maps as "a record-breaking shake-up in incumbency." Another stated the "legislative maps minimize distortions. They were devised in a transparent process that did seem to follow the principles of Amendments 5 and 6."

The maps now move through the final steps of the approval process, which include the Florida attorney general, the Florida Supreme Court and the U.S. Justice Department. Floridians can follow the progress online at www.floridaredistricting.org.

Voters may wonder whether their input has any impact. When you speak your mind at the ballot box, will your voice be clearly heard in the halls of the Capitol? I invite you to take a look at the newly adopted maps passed out of the House of Representatives. It won't take long for you to see the difference you made in your government.

Rep. Will Weatherford, a Republican from Wesley Chapel, is speaker-designate of the Florida House of Representatives and chairman of the House Redistricting Committee.

Capitol News Service » Blog Archive » House Redistricting Maps

[House Redistricting Maps](#)

February 6th, 2012 by Whitney Ray

Arguable the biggest issue of the legislative session is moving quickly through the process. The state senate passed redistricting maps last month. Now the house has approved its own versions. House Redistricting Chairman Will Weatherford says the new maps keep more cities and counties in tact that the old maps that cut hundreds of cities and counties into strange shapes.

“This map we just produced has only 75 city splits, so there is a reduction of almost 70 percent in city splits. County splits we only had 30 county splits which is a tremendous improvement over the last map,” said Weatherford.

Democrats say the maps are still drawn to guarantee the legislature is controlled by Republicans. The maps are expected to be challenged in court.

Posted in [Legislature](#), [Politics](#), [State News](#) |



Daily Commercial -

Bills and redistricting keep lawmakers busy

Staff Report

(Editor's note: This is a weekly feature in which four of Lake County's local state lawmakers recap what they did last week and what they hope to accomplish in the coming week.)

State Rep. Larry Metz, R-Yalaha

Metz said redistricting was the top issue this past week, as the House was expected to take final action on state House, state Senate and congressional maps on Friday.

After a presentation and amendments were made on Thursday, Metz said he expected the House redistricting to be approved. It would then be sent to the Senate for approval.

Under the redistricting, Lake County would have a three-member House delegation rather than the current four members. The district for Rep. Charles Van Zant, R-Palatka, would be moved further north and no longer include part of Lake. The areas for Metz, Rep. Marlene O'Toole, R-Lady Lake, and Rep. Stephen Precourt, R-Orlando, would also be redrawn.

Metz's district, which currently includes parts of Seminole and Volusia counties, would be entirely within Lake. Part of Lake would also be included in the Orange County district of Rep. Bryan Nelson, R-Apopka, Metz said. The map can be viewed at www.myfloridahouse.gov.

State Rep. H. Marlene O'Toole, R-Villages

In addition to lengthy sessions to address redistricting legislation, O'Toole said she presented her Higher Education Budget to the overall Appropriations Committee.

O'Toole also mentioned that Tuesday and Wednesday were "Lake County Days," in Tallahassee where visitors had the opportunity to meet with and address concerns with legislators, as well as advocate for community and business interests.

"Some newly appointed members of Lake Sumter Community College were in Tallahassee to introduce themselves to legislators, and I was glad we were able to discuss higher education policy issues," she said.

In addition to presenting her Higher Education Budget, O'Toole passed two bills through their final committees: HB 479 and HB 789.

Individually, Metz saw two of his bills advance. House Bill 591 would protect the properties of entities like the Lake County Water Authority from unlawful excavations for archeological artifacts. Permits can be issued for archeological activities on state-owned land, but current law does not cover political subdivisions, Metz said. The bill has been approved by two committees and must pass through one more before it is heard on the House floor, he said.

HB 1209 is a policy pronouncement telling Florida judges not to apply foreign law or judgments in certain family law cases in which that law violates fundamental rights or principles of the U.S. Constitution. That bill, co-sponsored by Metz, was approved by the civil justice subcommittee.

HB 479, Animal Control, updates the method by which animal shelters obtain euthanasia medications, and also prohibits the use of intracardiac injection to euthanize conscious animals.

"The changes this bill makes are long overdue and I'm very pleased to have gotten it through the committee process," O'Toole said.

HB 789, Workers' Compensation, makes some needed adjustments to the way stop-work orders are enforced for non-compliant businesses.

"In addition to simplifying the payment calculation process for the Department of Financial Services, it also creates a tiered penalty structure with varying rates based on how long a business has been out of compliance," O'Toole said, adding that she believes this will help businesses to re-open sooner, and said that the language was drafted with the input of DFS.

State Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland

Dockery has been busy on her ethics bill -- Ethical Practices Act of 2012; SB 552/HB 359 -- which was recently heard by the Governmental Operations Committee.

According to Dockery, the bill prohibits members of the Legislature from voting or participating in legislation that would provide a special, private benefit to the member, or if a member knows it would provide a special, private benefit to a relative.

Metz said the House will focus on the budget this week.

He also is optimistic that his local bill on the North Lake County Hospital District will be heard for the first time by the community and military affairs subcommittee. The bill would change how the district operates. The district levies a property tax of 1 mill that generates about \$10 million a year for privately owned Florida Hospital Waterman in Tavares and Leesburg Regional Medical Center. The proceeds help defray healthcare costs for indigent patients, but Metz is seeking more accountability for spending and costs, and wider distribution of the funds to providers of indigent care in the district.

O'Toole said she expects to have another bill, HB 1009, dealing with low-speed vehicles heard in committee next week, and also looks forward to presenting her budget on the floor for a vote.

State Sen. Alan Hays, R-Umatilla

Hays has had a busy week in Tallahassee, yet he took a brief break to give an update on the legislative front.

"I have had several bills heard in committee from a wide range of topics," Hays said. "The common theme has been streamlining government, removing obstacles for the business community, streamlining the process for exploring alternative water resources, and honoring our civil air patrol men and women who volunteer their time to help respond when Florida faces an emergency or natural disaster."

Hays also has additional responsibilities serving as Chair of General Government Appropriations.

"I have been working diligently with committee staff to prepare our budget," he said of the task at hand in overseeing general government appropriations on the state level.

Dockery is chronicling her final year in the Florida Senate as a columnist for Florida Voices, and this week plans to discuss why the proposed bill to privatize prisons will not save money.

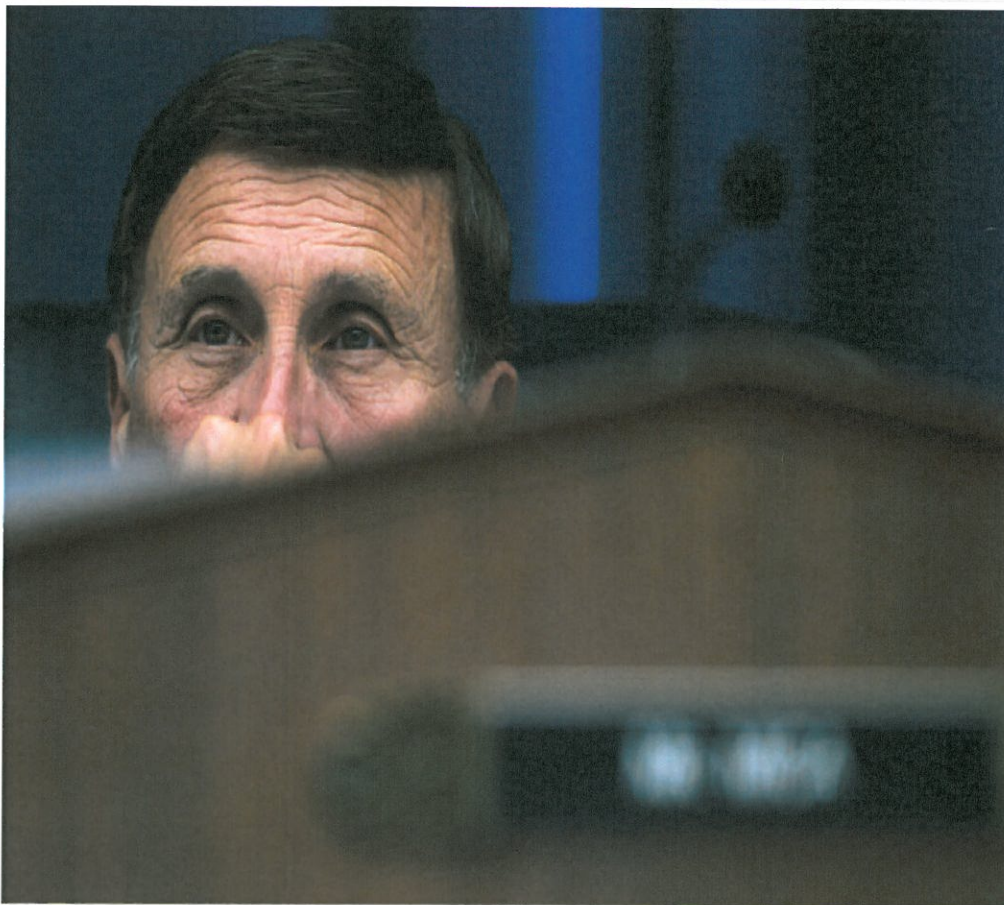


Big Opportunities, and Potential Losses, for Flagler Power in State and Federal Redistricting

[FlaglerLive](#) | February 7, 2012



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John Mica is House-hunting.

First, a little rumor-busting: Flagler County County Commissioner Milissa Holland is not running for Congress, whether John Mica is going to try to run again or not. Commissioner Barbara Revels, who came closest as a Flagler County representative to winning a seat in the Legislature in many years, isn't running for a Florida House or Senate seat, either, even though Bill proctor (who defeated Reve six years ago for a House seat) is term-limited. And Colleen Conklin isn't about to run for the county commission, as that would pit her against Revels in a Democratic primary.

Between the decennial redistricting of legislative and congressional boundaries and term limits, Flagler County has big opportunities and potentially big losses ahead—depending on how you see things, and which way those boundaries go.

The opportunities: If the Florida House redistricting plan is approved, both for Congress and the Legislature, Flagler would end up being at the heart of the new districts. Its voice would be especially amplified in a new House District 24, with Flagler kept whole, with a portion of Volusia County and a portion of St. Johns. But the dominant voting bloc would be Flagler's. That, plus Proctor no longer being a factor, opens a big opportunity for a Flagler County politician to essentially take back the sea for Flagler, something the county hasn't had in two generations. The State Senate boundaries are less attractive: they'd split Flagler down the middle, with both new State Senate seats shared with constituents lurching into St. Johns and Duval counties.

There may be opportunities for Flagler in congressional redistricting, too, but less so, as Flagler remains a bit part in whatever district encompasses it. Still, the House plan keeps Flagler whole as well, making it the geographic center of a new congressional seat, with Volusia, Putnam and St. John on the periphery. Proposed Congressional District 6 would essentially follow the same boundaries as the 7th Judicial district (an appetizing prospect for, say, a state attorney who tires of imprisoning criminals and decides to join the miscreants in Washington instead).

Here are the drawbacks: Flagler County could lose two very powerful voices. For the past several years, Flagler hasn't had direct representation either in Tallahassee or in Washington, but what representation it has had has risen to seniority posts with considerable political power.

John Mica, a Republican, is chairman of the powerful House Transportation Committee. His rhetoric about small government aside, Mica has used the position to shovel dollars to the district, in highway and some rail projects, and most notably, recently, in the form of a new control tower at the Flagler County Airport, which will allow an additional class of planes to land here.

John Thrasher, also a Republican, chairs the rules committee and is vice-chairman of the budget subcommittee on higher education appropriations. His voice has helped Flagler County's issues carry weight, especially in the county's recent [battle over the Hammock Dunes development](#)—which Flagler won, in a case that went [all the way to the Florida Cabinet](#), with Thrasher's help.

Bill Proctor in the House—also a Republican—has been less of a factor. His interest in Flagler County has seemed as peripheral as its geography. But he had seniority. That will end, too.

But Revels, now chairing the county commission and the county's newly created jobs council, isn't looking to run again for that seat. She refers to a climate of arrogance at the Legislature that isn't responsive to constituents' realities. "The way the current legislature is, the Rs and the Ds and the way they operate, the things they've done to Florida," Revels said, "you'd just be a fish running against the

stream and I just don't have a desire to go up there and beat my head against the wall. But Flagler County needs somebody, soon. Because if the House of Representatives map is adopted as we currently see it, Flagler County being the bulk of a house seat, and it's our first ever option in 50-some years to actually have true representation in Tallahassee, we need to have a very strong voice up there, which we just haven't had."



Barbara Revels

Meanwhile, there are vast uncertainties. First, the redistricting lines are likely to be fought over in court before they're finally approved. Second, Mica is shopping for a new home. His home, Winter Park, has been carved out of his old district. It's not clear whether he'll choose to run in that same district, pitting him in a primary against Sandy Adams, or whether he'll hop over to the 6th Congressional District—Flagler's—and hope to seduce his old constituents, with quite a few new ones.

His last Democratic challenger, Heather Beavens, who is from Flagler County, could not be reached Tuesday, but Dan Parham, who chairs the local Democratic Party, says it's very likely she'll jump in. "Heather I think is playing her cards close to the vest, waiting and seeing," Parham said, "but let me just put it this way: if the redistricting basically gives Flagler County someone who's covering the whole district, I'm sure she'll jump in."

One Democrat has already announced: Vipin Verma, a Daytona Beach attorney. And Fred Costello, the Republican member of the Florida House, has shown interest in running for the congressional seat as well. There's also, from Flagler, David Hochman, a writer and a local activist and leader of the Occupy movement.

Whoever runs, Parham has no illusions should Mica decide to shift this way. "I would prefer that he would go with whichever district covers the least amount of Flagler County," Parham said of Mica, "and I would want my Democrat to run in the district that has the majority of Flagler. To be honest, Mica is a formidable opponent. He's got the money, he has support among certain groups. So it's not an easy task for whatever Democrat goes up against Mike. The past couple of elections he's been challenged a little bit more. I think his problem, which is why he's hunting, is he's afraid of the primary. He was shook up in the primary in 2010, so I think he's looking around in trying to determine if he has a tea party or some other candidate run up against him."

But count Milissa Holland out. "I've heard those rumors for a few weeks now, and I have no interest run for Congress," Holland said Tuesday. "I love what I do here in Flagler County. It's been my home for 24 years and I think I've had positive impact and I want to continue doing that."

Holland credits Mica for doing good things for the county, but she doesn't put as much stock in seniority for the sake of seniority. "On a larger scale when you're talking about legislation that continues to funnel down to our communities, it's not one size fits all," Holland said. "I think there's been too much division and partisan politics at play and ultimately it's been the people that lose out time and again." She sees a greater chance for Flagler's own voice to be represented than has been the case in many years.



Milissa Holland (© FlaglerLive)

Craig Coffey, the county manager, has been keeping only a distant eye on the redistricting process because it's still so unsettled. "Obviously any time you have a change, it has an impact in our community because we take our time, we get to know these folks, we develop a working relationship with them," Coffey said. "You get a comfort with the person you're dealing with and develop that relationship. Well, any time you change, whether it's a commissioner, a manager, a legislator, you've got to rebuild those relationships. Right now, for us, on the federal level, Mica, I don't think we've had a more powerful guy on the federal level, I don't know what the history is, but probably in several decades. He's one of the power brokers in the House now. He's on major committees."

Doug Baxter, president of the Flagler County Chamber of Commerce and Affiliates, sees a Flagler delegation without Mica as "a great loss." But he, too, is hopeful that Flagler's own voice will have a chance to be heard in a realigned delegation. "It's important that we have a whole lot less ambiguity within the district lines," Baxter said. "We haven't had a representative in Tallahassee in over 40 years. Over time we will again, with our population growing. If the lines are drawn where most of the voting bloc for that seat is in Flagler County instead of Volusia County or in St. Augustine, we have a chance."

Baxter added: "We're doing good. We are doing good within our own boundaries. We need to continue to do that. But we're going to need some help from Tallahassee, we're going to need some help from the federal government, at the end of the day. Our local politicians are helping us. They see what we need to do because they're here every day. But they can only do so much. That's the problem."



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Go with House's districting plans

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Published: Wednesday, February 8, 2012 at 1:00 a.m.

If the Florida Senate adopts the House of Representatives' redistricting plans this week, the Legislature will take the preferable approach to reconfiguring the state's political boundaries.

The House's plans are not the best plans, according to three public-interest groups that have proposed alternatives, but they are superior to the Senate's — especially as they affect our region.

Redistricting follows the decennial U.S. Census and is intended to account for changes in the populations of districts and states; this year, Florida gains two congressional districts due to population growth.

Last Friday, state representatives approved new lines for congressional and Florida House districts. Senators endorsed their plan for congressional and state Senate seats in January, but legislative procedures call for senators to vote again Thursday.

The Legislature's approved maps for state House and Senate districts will be sent to the Florida Supreme Court for review; the congressional plan will go to Gov. Rick Scott for consideration.

All of the maps must be cleared by the U.S. Justice Department or a federal court for compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

Effects of amendments

What's more, the maps are certain to be challenged in court to determine if they comply with the terms of constitutional amendments passed by 63 percent of Florida voters in 2010.

Those amendments state that districts should not "be drawn with the intent to favor or disfavor a political party of incumbent." The amendments contain protections for minority-voting rights and say that districts "shall be compact ... and, where feasible, utilize existing political and geographical boundaries."

Based on independent analysis by a coalition of public-interest groups, the districts proposed by the Legislature meet the standards in the amendments in more instances than the current statewide setup.

Whether the maps ultimately approved by the Legislature adequately comply with the terms of the amendments will be determined by the courts.

The most notable local advantage of the House's plan is its treatment of congressional districts. The House would place nearly all of Manatee and Sarasota counties in one district — number 16.

Using Interstate 75 as a divider, the Senate would separate the eastern and western portions of Manatee and Sarasota and put them in different districts; those areas east of I-75 would be moved into a sprawling district, reaching far inland and including all or parts of 11 counties.

Bad idea.

In light of the strong political and economic ties between Manatee and Sarasota, and constitutional requirements for districts to be compact, the House plan is better — and in the best interests of the two counties and their people.

State seats

The House's plan for its districts in our region is visually sensible, with one exception. The plan would create four compact districts in Manatee and Sarasota; two of the four districts would consist only of Sarasota

County residents. The other two districts would cover parts of both Manatee and Sarasota counties. (One unfortunate result is that the city of Sarasota would be separated into three House districts.)

The exception to the compact design would be a narrow, north-south corridor from north Manatee — through parts of Palmetto and Bradenton —to north Sarasota. Those areas, heavily populated by racial minorities, would be part of a St. Petersburg-based district, as they have been for a decade.

Rep. Will Weatherford, the House redistricting committee's Republican chairman, told us this week that the elongated design of the district, which crosses Tampa Bay, was needed to comply with federal law. That argument is sensible and conforms with the status quo, which received federal scrutiny during redistricting 10 years ago.

The Senate's maps for its districts are hit-or-miss. The proposed district for all of Sarasota County, and part of north Charlotte County, is compact and logical.

The newly drawn Senate district for most of Manatee County is OK, though it extends to the northeast — near Plant City and Mulberry. The current district is sprawling as well, looping east of Sarasota and extending south to Cape Coral.

The other Senate district covering part of Manatee County would include much of the same minority-dominated corridor in the House district that reaches northward. Instead, the Senate district would extend to Tampa, as is now the case.

Ideally, such gerrymandering and division would be unnecessary, but Florida and other states must follow federal laws intended to ensure minority representation.

We had hoped that the Legislature would produce districts consistent statewide with the ideals established by the constitutional amendments. But in the absence of perfection, the House's maps are preferable; we hope the Senate recognizes as much.

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Final redistricting vote, in Senate, is Thursday

By KEVIN WADLOW

A state redistricting plan that affects Monroe County voters in two state legislative districts and a congressional district is scheduled for a Florida Senate vote Thursday.

If approved as now written, boundaries for Monroe County's seats in Congress, the Florida Senate and Florida House all change.

The redistricting bill expected to be heard on the Senate floor Thursday afternoon will be on a compromise plan reached with the House. Since Senate Republicans hold a 28-12 edge over Democrats in the chamber, the bill is expected to pass.

The most notable change comes in Florida Keys' representation in Congress.

U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, whose District 18 has included Monroe County for the past decade, would not be on the 2012 ballot in Monroe County. Her newly redrawn district now centers on the Miami area and excludes the Keys.

Monroe County would be aligned in a new congressional District 26, which includes the Keys, western Miami-Dade County and parts of eastern Collier County.

U.S. Rep. David Rivera, the incumbent for the redrawn region, is a first-term Republican who has not officially filed for re-election.

Key Largo resident Jose F. Peixoto, 50, has filed to run for Congress as an independent. Three other Miami-Dade residents have filed to run against Ros-Lehtinen or Rivera.

In the Legislature, Monroe County would become part of a new Senate District 40. Incumbent State Sen. Larcenia Bullard (D-Miami) is not running for re-election due to term limits.

Her son, state Rep. Dwight Bullard, has filed for her seat. James Bush III, a former Democratic state representative, also is running.

Larcenia Bullard's current District 39 includes parts of Broward County and Palm Beach County, which are dropped from the revised Senate district.

The new District 40 has a population of 474,566 people, including all residents in Monroe and Hendry counties, and some in eastern Collier County. Miami-Dade would still account for two-thirds of the District 40 population.

Florida House District 120, held by three-term incumbent Ron Saunders (D-Key West), would be drawn to include 154,924 residents, including 122,292 of voting age.

Miami-Dade County would account for 52.8 percent of the district population, but Monroe County has 50.8 percent of the voting-age residents. Saunders said the new district is more geographically compact and drops parts of Kendall. "It actually makes a little more sense," he said.

Saunders said he does not object to the new District 120 boundaries but voted against the overall redistricting plan because of concerns about other districts.

Redistricting is required after each national census, which occurs every 10 years. Any redistricting plan coming out of the Florida Legislature likely will be tested in court. And the plans will be reviewed by the governor's office as well as the Florida Supreme Court.

Mike Weinstein is 'all in' running for his House seat, but...

Submitted by [Matt Dixon](#) on February 9, 2012 - 10:17am [PolitiJax](#)

State Rep. Mike Weinstein, R- Jacksonville, said he is going to run again for his House seat, but left the door open a tad for a state Senate run.

"I am all in to run for my current House seat, that's where I am focused," Weinstein said. "I do see, though, changes to the state Senate map coming. I think it is seen as the most vulnerable to court challenge."

He said he was mulling a run at state Senate after being drawn into a district with fellow Jacksonville Republican Charles McBurney.

Last week, Jacksonville attorney Wyman Duggan changed the dynamic of the race when he filed to run against Nassau County Republican Aaron Bean, who has been filed to run for state Senate since 2008.

The current version of that district is represented by term-limited state Sen. Stephen Wise, R - Jacksonville.

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Districts meet some criteria, fall short on others

By MIKE SCHNEIDER

Posted on Thursday, 02.09.12

Posted on Thursday, 02.09.12

ORLANDO, Fla. -- Florida's proposed redistricting plan for congressional districts improves on two newly-required standards for reshaping the state's political boundaries but falls short on two others.

The Florida Senate will consider the plan on Thursday.

An analysis by The Associated Press shows the proposal creates more compact congressional districts and fewer cases of counties split up by district boundaries when compared to the old plan passed a decade ago.

But the new plan increases the number of districts with a wide split between Democrats and Republicans. And it slightly decreases the average district's minority population.

Florida voters last year approved new standards for reshaping congressional districts. They require that districts be compact, do nothing to dilute minority voting power or favor one party over another.

Fair-minded attempt to draw political lines

By TBO.COM | Staff

Published: February 09, 2012 Updated: February 09, 2012 - 12:00 AM

Florida's redistricting rules, tightened two years ago by voters in constitutional amendments, are strong.

The question now is execution. Is the work of the Republican-dominated Florida Legislature sufficiently nonpartisan to withstand legal challenge?

Clearly, the proposed Florida House districts and congressional districts are more compact and don't seem to unfairly penalize Democrats. The state Senate districts look more like pieces of jigsaw puzzle. Defending them may be more difficult.

What seems most apparent at this point in the U.S. Census-based redistricting process is that the Fair Districts reform was a very good idea, even if some of its proponents are not celebrating the result.

Rep. Will Weatherford, House Redistricting Committee chairman and a Republican from Wesley Chapel, was originally doubtful of the wisdom of tight parameters around the traditionally partisan exercise. Now he tells us, "Taking politics out of the process is probably the right thing to do."

He said his panel made no attempt to protect incumbents or to muscle Democrats into fewer districts. The new borders upset many incumbents and are evidence the process worked much as intended.

Weatherford notes that some 40 of 120 House members are either doubled with another incumbent or are outside their former districts.

Weatherford's home county of Pasco would be split into three logical House districts: east, middle and west. If politics played a part in that, it's hard to see how. The evidence of nonpartisan craftsmanship is less clear in the Senate, but even those districts are not as badly misshapen as they had been.

Remember that in certain urban areas, including Tampa, where there is a history of racial discrimination, the process had to begin with a federal requirement to help black voters elect someone of their race. That meant creative use of the districting pencil. Starting with irregular shapes was unavoidable.

Weatherford explained why House District 60 has an odd shape, including south Tampa and a long sliver of the Hillsborough coast. To give Hispanics and blacks a chance to win in District 62 (West Tampa and the airport area), and blacks a chance in 61 (mostly central and East Tampa), what you're left with is an oddly shaped district made up of coastal Tampa and south Tampa.

After accounting for race, the redistricting is supposed to produce compact divisions that respect county lines. Critics of the process say that despite the rules, politics crept in. They predict that the new maps will continue to produce an overwhelmingly Republican Legislature in a state in which only 36 percent of voters are registered Republicans.

Statewide, 41 percent of voters are registered Democrats, and 20 percent are independents. The rest belong to minor parties.

In our view, the new House districts appear reasonable. But the complaint of partisan tampering deserves review. If rules have been violated, the courts should tell the Legislature how to make corrections and why. It's unnecessary for judges to start drawing district lines, thus shaping the state's politics and compromising the independence of the lawmaking branch of government.

The Democratic minority

By TBO.COM | Staff

Published: February 09, 2012 Updated: February 09, 2012 - 12:00 AM

Let's look at how Republicans have turned their minority registration into a commanding majority in Tallahassee. Redistricting to weaken Democrats has played a part, but there are other factors.

The trouble for Democrats starts with packing so many blacks into a few so-called safe districts. Eighty percent of blacks in Hillsborough County register as Democrats, so the minority districts become Democratic districts.

What blacks gain in securing racially proportional representation — 15 percent of the Legislature is black in a state that is 16 percent black — other Democrats lose in surrounding districts, which otherwise would be closely divided.

With opportunities for white Democratic candidates reduced, almost half the Democrats in the Legislature are black.

Another reason Democrats are the minority party is that more independents are voting Republican. The most recent statewide races for governor and U.S. Senate were won by conservative Republicans, which cannot be attributed to clever districting.

Rep. Will Weatherford predicts that the districts he helped redraw will be more competitive this year than in 2010. "Republicans could lose seats," he says, and appears to mean it.

Even if he's wrong, that doesn't mean redistricting was unfair. The goal was not to guarantee a more politically balanced Legislature. It was to draw non-minority districts in more geographically sensible ways, and that appears to have been done.

Divided on redistricting

By LAURA KINSLER | The Tampa Tribune

Published: February 09, 2012 Updated: February 09, 2012 - 12:00 AM

TALLAHASSEE --

With its native son and future speaker of the House in charge of redistricting, a lot of folks thought Pasco County would be poised to gain seats and influence for the next decade.

But for many with their eyes on future political office, the maps that go before the state Senate today leave a lot to be desired.

"Sometimes with redistricting, personal ambitions can collide with politics," University of South Florida political scientist Susan MacManus said.

Longtime state Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, has been eying a run for Congress for years. He nearly ended up with a district that was virtually gift-wrapped — an open seat where two-thirds of the population live in Pasco. But the district was shifted west to pick up coastal Pinellas County — and incumbent congressman Gus Bilirakis' hometown of Palm Harbor.

"In the immediate future, I would not challenge Gus Bilirakis if the congressional district stayed the same," Fasano said. "Of course, we don't know what the courts will do."

If the court ends up redrawing the congressional map, the new districts likely wouldn't take effect until the 2014 election.

"I'm very disappointed in the final product," Fasano said.

Others speculate the district was changed at the last minute to punish Fasano, who had a very public falling out with the Pasco Republican Executive Committee over his support of Charlie Crist in the 2010 Senate race.

"Fasano can still put up a challenge if he wants to," Republican State Committeeman Bill Bunting said. A longtime Bilirakis supporter, Bunting said he'd like to see the congressman open at least one office in Pasco if he wins the new 12th District.

Rep. John Legg, R-Port Richey, chaired the subcommittee that drew the congressional maps, and he said the final version was his "plan C."

"It's still a Pasco seat," he said. "You can't win that congressional seat without winning Pasco County."

Many of the people who spoke at Pasco's redistricting public hearing last July say they're disappointed with the maps that are coming out of the Legislature. The proposed Senate map has caused the most heartburn for Pasco voters, who told legislators they wanted the county either kept whole or divided along east and west lines.

Zephyrhills High School Principal and mayoral candidate Steve Van Gorden complained that the proposed map keeps Zephyrhills and Dade City in separate Senate districts. "That makes absolutely no sense, in my opinion," he said.

State Senate candidate Wilton Simpson, R-Trilby, said the county would have been better served with a single Senate district. "They totally ignored the comments from our public hearing," Simpson said. "There wasn't a single person who said Pasco should be divided north-south."

Even Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, went public with his concerns that Pasco was being shortchanged. But he and his Senate counterpart agreed not to change each other's maps.

"Will Weatherford had no input on the Senate map," Fasano said. "He had concerns, and he went public with them. But in the end, it had zero impact."

The way the districts are drawn, Legg could challenge incumbent Sen. Jim Norman, D-Hillsborough, for

District 15. He and his wife own a home in Trinity, which is just inside the district line. But Legg said he plans to run in District 20.

"I'm running in west Pasco," Legg said. "I see (the 15th) as more of a Hillsborough and central Pasco seat."

Fasano said he expects the Florida Supreme Court to reject the Senate map for failing to comply with Amendment 5. The Fair Districts Amendment says legislators cannot draw districts designed to favor incumbents. While the House map put 35 sitting members in competing districts, not a single state senator was drawn out of his or her district.

Florida redistricting: Florida redistricting passes Senate — and lawsuits begin

February 09, 2012|By Aaron Deslatte and Kathleen Haughney, Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Florida lawmakers ended months of debate Thursday by passing new boundaries for congressional and legislative districts — the first step in a legal shootout that could determine congressional and state government control for the next decade.

Moments after the Senate voted 32-5 to pass the redrawn political maps, the Florida Democratic Party filed a lawsuit in Leon County Circuit Court, alleging the congressional plan violated the state's constitutional prohibition against drawing lines that intentionally favor political parties or incumbents.

Separately, a coalition of groups that backed the 2010 Fair Districts changes, including the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, the National Council of La Raza and others, announced they planned to file their own challenge as soon as Gov. Rick Scott signs the maps into law.

Both groups also plan to challenge the maps for [new House](#) and Senate seats once they are approved by Attorney General Pam Bondi and sent to the Florida Supreme Court for review.

The coalition's complaint claims the congressional map was "intentionally enhanced" and accuses Republican U.S. Reps. Dan Webster of Winter Garden and Mario Díaz-Balart of Miami of taking "affirmative steps to influence members of the legislature and its staff to 'improve' the composition of their new districts to make them more favorable."

It also castigates lawmakers for "packing artificially high numbers of minorities into certain districts" — singling out the Jacksonville-to-Orlando district of Democratic U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown — to "diminish the influence" of minorities in surrounding districts by rendering them more white and more likely to vote Republican.

The Democratic Party lawsuit doesn't get quite as specific but alleges the same basic gerrymandering took place.

"The Senate passed maps that fail to meet the plain meaning of Fair Districts," Democratic Party Chairman Rod Smith said.

"The language was really clear: It can't be for incumbent protection, and it can't be for partisan advantage," Smith said. "If the net result is a decade of overwhelming partisan advantage or a decade where incumbents from both parties have in fact protected themselves ... that is directly addressed in the lawsuit."

But Senate Redistricting Chairman Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, dismissed the complaints, saying the court fights were inevitable.

"We were told ... that we would be sued no matter what the lines were, no matter how the districts were drawn," Gaetz said. "My father used to say, 'Some people would complain if you hung them with a new rope,' and I think we had people who all along had a lawsuit strategy and hoped that somehow they could find some judge, somewhere, who would agree with their contentions."

The Fair Districts changes passed by 63 percent of voters statewide in 2010 require challengers to show proof that lawmakers drew the maps with the "intent" of gerrymandering. Though the Fair Districts groups alleged that Webster and Diaz-Balart intentionally sought to influence the process, they release no evidence — and wouldn't comment on what proof they planned to present.

Gaetz told reporters: "Neither Congressman Diaz-Balart nor Congressman Webster have spoken to me about these maps."

Webster's spokeswoman Kelly Kwas emailed that "we have not received a complaint. If and when we do, we will immediately respond."

"The allegations are an absolute and total fabrication," Diaz-Balart said in an email. "I have never spoken to any legislator about making districts more favorable to myself or anyone else. Fair district should accept the fact that the Legislature drew maps that meet or exceed Amendment 6 and unlike their proposal does not disenfranchise minority voters."

Senate leaders said they had budgeted \$5 million for redistricting litigation, while the [House](#) has been sitting on a larger \$30 million reserve it has drawn on to pay for redistricting work and litigation.

Senate President Mike Haridopolos, R-Merritt Island, said he hoped any changes the courts might direct could be handled quickly in a special session.

"We think the courts will show a lot of respect for the good work done," he said. "Should the courts come in and have some minor adjustments, we'd I'm sure quickly go into session so we could meet."

Although Democrats hold a raw numerical advantage of about 500,000 voters statewide, the state Legislature and congressional delegation have been dominated by Republicans for more than a decade.

That was partly because, beginning in 1992, lawmakers agreed to "pack" minorities into more urban-centered districts, thus diluting Democratic votes in surrounding seats. The practice has been upheld by federal courts under the Voting Rights Act, and Florida's constitutional changes explicitly prohibit state lawmakers from weakening the power of minorities to elect candidates of their choice.

Black caucus chair slams Gaetz for ‘hung them with a new rope’ remark – Central Florida Political Pulse – Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — State Rep. **Mia Jones**, D-Jacksonville, just sent out a statement chastising Sen. **Don Gaetz**, R-Niceville, for remarks he made following the redistricting vote Thursday as “highly charged and disturbing.”

Gaetz, Thursday evening, was asked for his reaction to news that lawsuits were already prepared to challenge the new congressional and legislative maps that the Senate had just passed. Gaetz said he was not surprised and made the following remark:

“We were told ... that we would be sued no matter what the lines were, no matter how the districts were drawn,” Gaetz said. “My father used to say, ‘Some people would complain if you hung them with a new rope,’ and I think we had people who all along had a lawsuit strategy and hoped that somehow they could find some judge, somewhere, who would agree with their contentions.”

Jones, the chair of the Black Caucus, released the following statement today:

“Senator Gaetz’ use of such highly charged and disturbing language has absolutely no place in this important discussion about the future of Florida. His remarks are extremely inappropriate. But in spite of his comments, I urge my colleagues in the Legislature and all Floridians to take the high road. I believe it is important that we continue to elevate the public discourse as we seek a fair and just system that protects the voting rights of all.”

Rep. **Perry Thurston**, D-Plantation, also released a statement saying that the remarks were “inflammatory.”

“The senator’s comment is especially appalling given that it is made in connection to the issue of redistricting, in which there is considerable history of racial minorities being deprived of adequate representation,” Thurston said. “The senator’s comment is harmful, hurtful and shameful.”

Black lawmakers say Sen. Gaetz 'rope' remarks are racially insensitive

African-American legislators are condemning Sen. **Don Gaetz**' comments [about opponents to the redistricting process](#), saying he used language that evokes lynchings by the Ku Klux Klan.

Speaking to reporters about legal challenges to maps that have been approved by the House and Senate, Gaetz said certain factions were set out from the beginning to challenge the process in court no matter how lines were drawn. Gaetz, R-Niceville, is the Senate's incoming president and oversaw the redistricting efforts.

"We were told by individuals who testified on behalf of special interest groups -- I'm sorry, non-partisan groups -- that we would be sued no matter what the lines were, no matter how the districts were drawn," Gaetz said Thursday. "My father used to say some people would complain if you hung them with a new rope. And we have people who all along had a lawsuit strategy and hope that somehow they could find some judge somewhere who will agree with their contentions."

Sen. **Arthenia Joyner**, D-Tampa, was among three legislators who issued press releases within minutes of each on Friday afternoon blasting Gaetz's comments.

"This statement is highly offensive to me," Joyner said. "The use of his analogy reflects back on an extremely violent period in our country's and our state's history. And it shows an insensitivity on the part of the Senator about the hard-fought passage of Blacks from slaves to citizens."

Rep. **Perry Thurston** of Plantation, the Democrat's point person on redistricting in the House, Rep. **Mia Jones**, D-Jacksonville, the Legislative Black Caucus chairwoman, also issued news releases criticizing Gaetz. But Joyner's statement was the most biting.

Gaetz told the Times/Herald his dad's colloquialism was about hangings, but not in the context the black legislators alluded to, and he said he meant no harm.

"I come from cowboy country in the upper Midwest where horse thieves were viewed as a low form of life, and stealing a person's horse 150 years ago in my home country was almost a capital offense," Gaetz said. "It was in that context that my father made the comment."

He said he didn't mean to offend minorities with his statements Thursday.

"It was clearly ironic," Gaetz said. "It was absolutely not in the context of lynching blacks. I am sorry if offense was taken. Those who know me and those who work with me are well aware that no offense was meant."

Gaetz said he didn't know black lawmakers were offended by his comments until he heard about their news releases. No one called him to complain or asked him to clarify his statements, he said.

Here is the full text of Joyner's statement:

TALLAHASSEE – Senate Democratic Leader Pro Tem Arthenia Joyner (D-Tampa) on Friday called on Senate President-designate Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) to apologize for his unacceptable remarks following the Senate passage of redistricting maps.

“Senator Gaetz is quoted in the Orlando Sentinel as saying: ‘My father used to say, ‘Some people would complain if you hung them with a new rope.’ This statement is highly offensive to me. The

use of his analogy reflects back on an extremely violent period in our country's and our state's history. And it shows an insensitivity on the part of the Senator about the hard-fought passage of Blacks from slaves to citizens.

"It wasn't too long ago when a black man could find himself hung from a tree for casting a casual glance at a white woman. It wasn't too long ago when the Ku Klux Klan still roamed the state killing black men because they so feared what they did not care to understand. It wasn't too long ago when a group of white vigilantes shot and lynched Sam Carter in the prelude to the Rosewood massacre, the tragic events of which this legislature only recently and finally acknowledged. And it seems like only yesterday when the terrifying white robes of the KKK marched through my hometown of Lakeland and my father cautioned his children – I was 4 years old at the time - to douse the lights, close the blinds and lock the doors.

"In the conclusion of this week's 'State of Black Florida' summit, sponsored by the Florida Conference of Black State Legislators, Senator Gaetz would do well to reflect on his inflammatory words and the chilling effect they impose not only on Blacks, but anyone who knows and appreciates their history. He would do well to reflect on his concern for fair minority representation during the redistricting hearings, and his disconnect from Black history immediately following the vote.

And he should be deeply ashamed."

Bondi sends redistricting plans to Supreme Court

Attorney General **Pam Bondi** sent the Legislature's redistricting plans to the Florida Supreme Court on Friday — a move that will start justices' review of the maps.

Under state law, Bondi had 15 days to act. But she sent the proposals to the court about 24 hours after they earned final [approval from the state Senate](#).

Justices will have 30 days to examine the plans. The court is asked to determine if the plans for redrawing the state's 40 Senate districts and 120 House seats complies with state law, including new constitutional standards requiring that boundaries be drawn without concern for incumbents or either political party.

The Florida Democratic Party has already filed suit in Leon County Circuit Court against the congressional map, also approved Thursday.

Gov. **Rick Scott** is expected to sign the plan into law next week. Scott's action is expected to bring another lawsuit by the League of Women Voters, La Raza and Common Cause of Florida, which contend the Legislature's ruling Republicans designed the plan to help the party maintain its majority in the congressional delegation.

Tags: [Amendments 5 and 6](#), [Florida Democratic Party](#)

This entry was posted on Friday, February 10th, 2012 at 5:37 pm and is filed under [2012 campaigns](#), [Constitutional Amendments](#), [Florida Supreme Court](#), [legislature](#), [Pam Bondi](#), [redistricting](#), [Republicans](#), [Rick Scott](#), [State Senate](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

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Lawsuit Filed Over New Map

State Sen. Paula Dockery joins four Democrats in voting against congressional redistricting plan.

By Bill Rufty

LEDGER POLITICAL EDITOR

Published: Thursday, February 9, 2012 at 11:57 p.m.

TALLAHASSEE | Democrats filed a lawsuit against a congressional redistricting map immediately after that plan and a second one redrawing Florida House and Senate districts received final approval Thursday from the Republican-controlled Legislature.

Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland, joined four Democrats to vote against the congressional redistricting plan, which passed 32-5. She was one of two Republicans, along with Sen. Mike Fasano of New Port Richey, to vote against the bill setting districts for Florida House and Senate, which passed 31-7.

The Senate sent the congressional map (HB 1174) to Gov. Rick Scott and the legislative plan (SJR 1176) to the Florida Supreme Court. Both passed in the House last week.

The Democrats contend the maps violate anti-gerrymandering standards in the two Fair Districts amendments to the Florida Constitution that voters approved in 2010. The suit was filed in state Circuit Court here. Florida Democratic Party officials said they would contest the legislative maps during the Supreme Court review.

The boundaries negotiated by the House may be more fair to Polk County, Dockery said, than those first proposed by the Senate for Congress, but the county is still split four ways. In the version largely influenced by the House, Polk County could retain control of its one congressional district. In the Senate version, now rejected, it might not.

The 12th Congressional District, which will become the 15th Congressional District under the new boundaries, is split between Hillsborough and Polk counties, a far better situation for the county and the incumbent in the seat, Dennis Ross, R-Lakeland.

The Senate version of congressional districts had Ross' 12th District stretching all the way to Charlotte County with only 23 percent of the district's population in Polk.

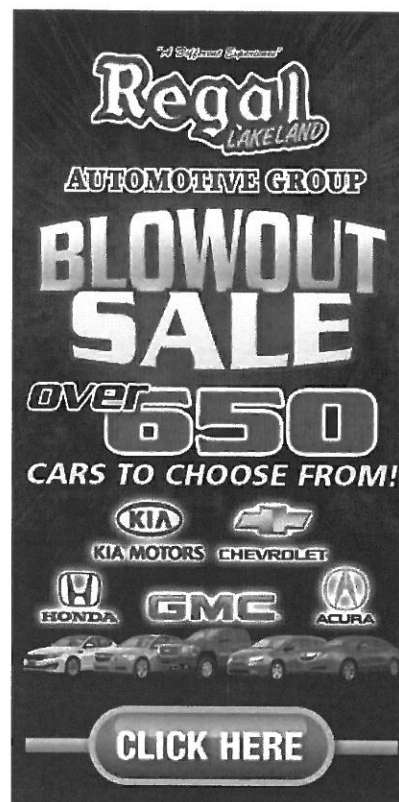
"It is a Lakeland seat," House Redistricting Committee Chairman and Speaker Designate Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, told The Ledger earlier this week. "It is the first time that districts were drawn without politics or political intent."

Dockery had a different view.

"It is a Lakeland seat in that he meant that the House kept Lakeland from being split over three congressional districts, as the Senate had it," she said. "But Hillsborough has more people (in the district)."

"But much of the area in Hillsborough is part of Dennis' district now and he was in the Florida House, so he has name recognition,"

Dockery said if Ross were to leave the seat or if a big-name Hillsborough resident were to defeat him, Polk County would have no member of Congress.



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District 15, which has the most Polk County residents of the four districts thrown across it, still has only 41 percent of the district's voters.

Under the new boundaries, 18 percent of the residents in District 17 would be from Polk County, as would 10 percent of the residents in District 9 and 17 percent of the residents in District 10.

Both the 9th and 10th districts are primarily made up of Orange County residents and District 17 stretches south to Charlotte County.

The Florida House districts give Polk a greater voice in the state government, with five districts as the county has now, Rep. John Wood, R-Winter Haven said. And in four of those districts, Polk has more voters than any other county.

Dockery and Fasano both said Thursday the Senate districts "butcher" their counties.

"Lakeland is split among three Senate districts," she said.

Weatherford, who negotiated to get the House version of congressional districts accepted by the Senate, said incumbents and parties were not considered in the drawing of the districts, which falls in line with guides laid down by the Fair District Amendments approved by Florida voters.

He said 38 members of the House have another incumbent House member in their districts.

The U.S. Constitution requires that each state redraw its own legislative districts and congressional districts every 10 years.

The Senate earlier approved plans for a congressional district and its own districts and sent them to the House. The House approved the Senate districts without change, then negotiated alterations of the Senate's congressional districts and sent both back to the Senate, along with the House districts.

Republicans insisted the maps conform to the amendments that prohibit the intentional drawing of districts to favor or disfavor incumbents or political parties.

Senate Reapportionment Committee Chairman Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, argued that it doesn't matter if the maps favor the GOP or incumbents because if they do that, result was unintentional.

"Effect does not prove intent," Gaetz said. "The effect is irrelevant legally and constitutionally."

Rep. Mike Horner, R-Kissimmee, is a member of the full House Redistricting Committee. His District 79, currently includes a small portion of southeastern Polk County. Under the new redistricting plan, Polk County residents will make up 40 percent of that district.

"We were very careful in drawing the districts. Of course it won't please everyone, but they have been drawn fairly," he said earlier in the week.

Horner used the same word that Weatherford and other House redistricting members have used to describe it — "defensible."

Each of the three plans substantially increases the number of cities and counties that are not split by boundaries, Gaetz said.

"That's wonderful if you are not in Polk County," Dockery said.

Congressional boundaries, however, are the same as the current ones for most of North and South Florida counties and all of northeastern Florida.

Gaetz said the House amendments to the Senate plan reconfigure Polk County to keep all of Lakeland with Bartow, Mulberry and Plant City in a single district.

While Democrats filed a lawsuit against a congressional redistricting map Thursday, Dockery said suits could be filed from various groups and some local governments throughout the state, too.

"I couldn't vote for this when Lakeland and Polk County might file suit," she said.

[Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.]

Bondi asks Fla. justices to review legislative redistricting maps, 30 day clock starts ticking

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Attorney General [Pam Bondi](#) has asked the [Florida](#) Supreme Court to review the [Legislature](#)'s plan to redistrict the state House and Senate.

Bondi filed the petition Friday, just a day after the maps received final approval in the Republican-controlled [Legislature](#).

The justices now have 30 days to decide whether the plan complies with the [Florida](#) Constitution, including a new anti-gerrymandering amendment.

Democrats and three nonpartisan groups that supported the Fair Districts amendment say they'll urge the justices to reject the plan.

They say it unfairly favors Republicans and incumbents and fails to protect minority voting rights.

Lawmakers also passed a congressional plan and sent it to Gov. [Rick Scott](#).

Democrats on Thursday sued in Circuit Court alleging that map violates a similar congressional amendment although Scott hasn't yet signed it.



Gaetz: No offense was meant in redistricting comments

Tallahassee -- Senate President Designate **Don Gaetz**, R-Niceville, said "no offense was meant" in his remarks last night that several Democratic lawmakers have said were racially insensitive.

"None of the three legislators at had called me or spoken to me in any way. I'm sorry if offense was taken," he said. "Those who know me and those who work with me are well aware that no offense was meant. "

Gaetz, Thursday evening, was asked for his reaction to news that lawsuits were already prepared to challenge the new congressional and legislative maps that the Senate had just passed. Gaetz said he was not surprised and made the following remark:

"We were told ... that we would be sued no matter what the lines were, no matter how the districts were drawn," Gaetz said. "My father used to say, 'Some people would complain if you hung them with a new rope,' and I think we had people who all along had a lawsuit strategy and hoped that somehow they could find some judge, somewhere, who would agree with their contentions."

Reps. **Mia Jones**, D-Jacksonville and **Perry Thurston**, D-Fort Lauderdale, and Sen. **Arthenia Joyner**, D-Tampa, have all put out statements today criticizing him for his remarks.

"It wasn't too long ago when a black man could find himself hung from a tree for casting a casual glance at a white woman," Joyner said in a release.

John Mica says he'll run against Sandy Adams

February 08, 2012|By Mark K. Matthews, Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- After weeks of silence, U.S. Rep. John Mica of Winter Park said Wednesday that he plans to run for re-election in a redrawn congressional district centered on Seminole County — setting up a potentially bruising primary with fellow Republican Sandy Adams of Orlando.

Mica's decision comes as the state Legislature nears the end of the once-a-decade process of redrawing congressional lines, a process that inevitably leads to jockeying among incumbents seeking the best districts to defend.

Adams took the first step last month when she announced she would run for re-election in a District 7 seat that runs north from Winter Park to Orange City and includes large chunks of Seminole county, including much of the District 24 she represents now.

A Tea Party favorite elected in 2010, Adams said she made that call after speaking with Mica last month. In a brief interview, Adams said he told her "not to worry" -- a phrase she took to mean that it would be OK for her to seek the new District 7 seat.

In turn, she said, Mica would run in the neighboring District 6, which includes Volusia, Flagler, St. Johns and Putnam counties — much of which he represents in his current District 7.

But Mica disputed Adams' account.

"I said that we both could win in either district," said Mica, who lives in Winter Park and has represented most of the new district during his 20-year congressional career.

"My [home](#) is there. This is a decision I made with my wife, my family and my supporters," he said.

If neither budes, a Mica-Adams primary could be a rough-and-tumble affair. Mica chairs the [House](#) Transportation Committee and would bring to bear all the weapons of an old bull Republican — well-heeled connections groomed by two decades on Capitol Hill.

And as of the end of 2011, Mica had about three times as much campaign [money](#) — about \$860,000 to her \$313,000.

Adams, though, can count on the backing of the Tea Party caucus and could cast the race as a battle for the soul of the Republican Party. Differences in their attitudes toward federal spending likely would be central to that effort.

That would leave businessman Craig Miller the only announced candidate for the District 6 seat. The former CEO of Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, Miller dropped his U.S. Senate bid to run there on the same day Adams said she's running for District 7.

Adams, for now, is sticking to her guns.

"The congresswoman has declared where she is running and what her intentions are, and I think that statement speaks for itself right now," said Charlie Keller, her chief of staff.

Florida: Mica Takes On Adams in Member-Vs.-Member Race

By [Joshua Miller](#) Posted at 3:15 p.m. on Feb. 10

Rep. John Mica officially announced his bid for re-election in Florida's proposed 7th district today, confirming a race versus fellow Republican Rep. Sandy Adams.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure chairman's [likely move](#) was reported earlier this week. Adams, a freshman, announced Jan. 30 that she would run in the 7th.

"I have lived in Central Florida for 40 years, raised my family here, was successful in business here and enjoyed strong support from this community," Mica said in a statement. "After consultation with my wife Pat, my family and my supporters, I have decided to continue my public service in what constitutes District 7 in the final map approved by the Florida Legislature."



(Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call)

The proposed map, [awaiting Gov. Rick Scott's \(R\) signature](#), draws the 7th district north of Orlando. It contains 51 percent of Adams' current district and 42 percent of Mica's current district, according to statistics tabulated by the Legislature. Mica is serving his 10th term in the House.

The map, almost certain to be signed into law soon, can be viewed [here](#).

Voters key in Florida redistricting

By Rep. Will Weatherford

Once every 10 years, the Florida Legislature is required to redraw maps for the House, Senate and congressional districts. Whether the effort was led by Democrats or Republicans, the result was always the same: Maps were drawn that took into account the wishes of incumbents. It was a perfectly legal and generally tolerated practice -- until this year.

As a result of two constitutional amendments passed by a supermajority of voters in Florida, the Legislature was given new guidelines for drawing maps. Floridians spoke loud and clear.

The first requirement approved was to ensure districts preserved the right of minorities to participate equally in the political process. Voters asked us to produce maps which did not favor incumbents, but were drawn more compact. They also asked, where feasible, for us to use existing city, county, and geographical boundaries.

As the chair of the House Redistricting effort, we undertook a deliberate effort to include Floridians in the new process. From offering free mapping software to conducting public meetings around the state, we sought the input of the people of Florida.

And it worked. More than 4,700 citizens attended our 26 statewide public meetings and more than 1,600 appeared before the committee. There were thousands of others who participated online via Facebook, Twitter, email, and by watching via the Florida Channel online.

The committee received 300 additional written suggestions for redistricting maps and 177 public submissions of redistricting plans -- up from only four in 2002. We also received more than 34,000 visitors to the redistricting website, 520 page likes on Facebook, 800 Twitter followers and sent out more than 1,700 informative updates.

In Tallahassee, we held numerous committee and subcommittee meetings over the course of the last several months and considered several amendments that enhanced the maps and made them more legally compliant.

We produced maps that elevated the input of voters over the requests of politicians. In fact, as many as one-third of all House members currently share a district with an incumbent under the current House map. These changes impacted Republicans and Democrats alike. This is because drawing districts for specific members was not our goal. Our purpose was to follow state and federal laws and take partisanship out of the process.

The new maps embody the changes that voters wanted. Don't just take my word for it. One major newspaper described the new maps as "a record-breaking shakeup in incumbency." Another stated the "legislative maps minimize distortions. They were devised in a transparent process that did seem to follow the principles of Amendments 5 and 6."

The maps now move through the final steps of the approval process, which include the Florida attorney general, the Florida Supreme Court and the U.S. Department of Justice. Floridians can follow the progress online at www.floridaredistricting.org.

Voters may wonder whether their input has any impact. When you speak your mind at the ballot box, will your voice be clearly heard in the halls of the Capitol? I invite you to take a look at the newly adopted maps passed out of the House of Representatives. It won't take long for you to see the difference you made in your government.

Will Weatherford, a Republican from Wesley Chapel, is the speaker-designate of the Florida House of Representatives and the chairman of House Redistricting Committee.

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Friendly Fire Coming in House Re-Elections?: Redistricting is forcing many House representatives to battle members of their own party--especially on the Democratic side

Alex M. Parker U.S. News & World Report February 10, 2012

They're two beloved figures in Ohio politics who have become national figures for their party. And by next year, there will be only one in Congress.

[Marcy Kaptur](#) and [Dennis Kucinich](#) are two of at least 20 House representatives--mostly on the Democratic side--who have been forced, through redistricting, to run in partisan primaries against fellow members of Congress.

Consider it one of the side benefits of controlling the redistricting process--aside from reducing the other party's number of seats in Congress, you also get to sit back and watch some of their big names drain away time and money in fights which ultimately hurt their party.

[Republicans](#), who controlled the redistricting process across most of the electoral map following their sweep in the 2010 elections, have the edge this year. But they are still looking at four likely intra-party matchups of their own.

[\[Washington Whispers: 'Joe the Plumber' Says He's Handy on the Campaign Trail\]](#)

Earlier this week, freshman Rep. [Ben Quayle](#), son of vice president [Dan Quayle](#), announced he would run against fellow freshman Rep. David Schweikert, a well-respected long-time Arizona state senator who impressed his party last year by knocking out incumbent Democratic Rep. Harry Mitchell.

On Thursday, long-serving Florida Republican Rep. [John Mica](#) announced he would run in Florida's 6th District, likely setting up a race against Rep. [Sandy Adams](#), who was elected in 2010.

[Democrats](#), meanwhile, are facing at least six such matchups. Many, such as the race between Kaptur and Kucinich, and bound to attract national attention, but are in relatively safe regions for the Democrats. Hugging the Lake Erie coastline, Ohio's new 9th District, approved by the Republican-controlled state commission, stretches from Toledo to Cleveland, which are reliably Democratic districts. But pitting Kaptur--the longest serving woman in the House--against Kucinich, who has raised his national profile with presidential runs in 2004 and 2008, is bound to create fireworks. Already, the hits have begun, with Kaptur campaign manager Steve Fought [implying that Kucinich is a "showhorse."](#)

"It's a problem every redistricting cycle," says one GOP strategist. "It definitely does drain away money."

In Pennsylvania's 12th District, Rep. [Mark Critz](#), the former district director for Keystone state legend Jack Murtha, will face off against Rep. [Jason Altmire](#), a rising star who won his seat in 2006. The winner will have to emerge from the primary wreckage in a tough general election matchup in a district which is regarded as a likely toss-up in most analyses.

Democrats will also face races against incumbents in California, Michigan and New Jersey, while Republicans will see such races in Illinois, Louisiana and Florida.

--See [political cartoons about the economy](#).

--[Santorum shakes up GOP presidential race](#).

--See [political cartoons about the Tea Party](#).

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Statement from Florida Senator Arthenia Joyner on Senator Don Gaetz's 'hung with a new rope' analogy

TALLAHASSEE – Senate Democratic Leader Pro Tem Arthenia Joyner (D-Tampa) on Friday called on Senate President-designate Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) to apologize for his unacceptable remarks following the Senate passage of redistricting maps.

“Senator Gaetz is quoted in the Orlando Sentinel as saying: ‘My father used to say, ‘Some people would complain if you hung them with a new rope.’ This statement is highly offensive to me. The use of his analogy reflects back on an extremely violent period in our country’s and our state’s history. And it shows an insensitivity on the part of the Senator about the hard-fought passage of Blacks from slaves to citizens.

“It wasn’t too long ago when a black man could find himself hung from a tree for casting a casual glance at a white woman. It wasn’t too long ago when the Ku Klux Klan still roamed the state killing black men because they so feared what they did not care to understand. It wasn’t too long ago when a group of white vigilantes shot and lynched Sam Carter in the prelude to the Rosewood massacre, the tragic events of which this legislature only recently and finally acknowledged. And it seems like only yesterday when the terrifying white robes of the KKK marched through my hometown of Lakeland and my father cautioned his children – I was 4 years old at the time - to douse the lights, close the blinds and lock the doors.

“In the conclusion of this week’s ‘State of Black Florida’ summit, sponsored by the Florida Conference of Black State Legislators, Senator Gaetz would do well to reflect on his inflammatory words and the chilling effect they impose not only on Blacks, but anyone who knows and appreciates their history. He would do well to reflect on his concern for fair minority representation during the redistricting hearings, and his disconnect from Black history immediately following the vote.

And he should be deeply ashamed.”

Nancy Pelosi: 5 states key for Democrats to take House

SAN DIEGO (AP) -- House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi predicts that California and four other large states will bring Democrats within striking distance of gaining control of the chamber this year.

Pelosi said she expected California, Florida, Illinois, New York and Texas to leave the party only about a half-dozen seats short. She declined to predict how many seats she anticipated picking up, saying only that she would be happy with the 25 needed to take control from Republicans.

President Barack Obama won't campaign in four of the five target states because they are not presidential battlegrounds, Pelosi said. Florida is the exception.

"We're within range just naming those five states -- just a handful, a half-dozen more to go -- so we feel very good about the numbers," Pelosi said Friday at a news conference on the opening day of the California Democratic Convention.

Pelosi singled out three races in newly drawn districts in California. Democrats are running Ami Berra in a rematch to unseat Sacramento area Rep. Dan Lungren, astronaut Jose Hernandez in a Central Valley district, and Mark Takano in the Riverside area.

"We are very, very proud of them. We believe that they will be joining the ranks of the Democratic majority come November," Pelosi said. "We expect to do even more than that (in California) but at least in those three cases in the drive for 25 to take back the House."

The California Democratic Party has

Advertisement

targeted six other districts, stretching from Sacramento to San Diego.

Daniel Scarpinato, a spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, dismissed the Democratic leader's remarks.

"The more Nancy Pelosi talks, the less likely Democrats are to win any seats. She has an agenda that the American people have already rejected coast to coast," he said.

The party continues its three-day convention Saturday, with Gov. Jerry Brown and U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein scheduled to speak.

Both parties are looking to California as a state that will play a big role in determining which party retains control of the House. Redistricting has led several incumbents to either retire or to run in districts that contain communities unfamiliar with their name and work.

Republicans have also identified five districts now controlled by Democrats. They've targeted incumbents such as Reps. Jerry McNerney and Lois Capps.

Most analysts have predicted that Democrats are likely to add to their majority in California, which now stands at 34 Democrats versus 19 Republicans.

California's new independent redistricting process has given Democrats hope that they will be able to expand their majority status, at least in the state Senate, where they hope to capture an additional two seats. That would be enough for the two-thirds majority that would allow Democrats to pass tax increases without Republican votes.

This year, a new primary system in which the top two vote-getters advance to the general election,

regardless of party, will be in widespread use for the first time. It is expected to force candidates of both major parties to spend more money than they typically have in a primary election cycle because they must appeal to a wider swath of the electorate, not just party die-hards.

Newly drawn political boundaries for state Assembly, Senate and congressional districts also are causing complications for Democrats, who enjoy majorities in both houses of the Legislature and in the states' congressional delegation. Some have to move districts or challenge members of their own party in the June primary.

Associated Press writer Kevin Freking in Washington, D.C., contributed to this report.



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Voting shifts weaken Republican strength of Miami Dade's congressional seats

To understand the demographic shifts of Florida's growing Hispanic vote, you need only look to South Florida, where three congressional districts long dominated by registered Republican voters are being crowded out by more Democrats and independents.

Tallahassee has taken notice. This week, [legislators approved a redistricting plan](#) that would offer safer and stronger districts for Miami's three Cuban-American Republican lawmakers, U.S. Reps. Mario Diaz-Balart, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and David Rivera.

Since 2002, the last time legislators reconfigured the political districts to reflect the new census data, the number of registered voters has soared in their districts.

Growth has been particularly strong among non-Cuban Hispanic voters, the majority of which have registered as independent, no party affiliation or Democrat, political analysts say.

The results have Democrats salivating while Republicans, armed with new maps, remain confident they will retain their stronghold. [Story here.](#)

"Miami-Dade is not staying with three Republican Congress people," predicts Christian Ulvert, a Miami-based Democratic political consultant. "With Miami's population changes, and the fact that Hispanics tend to be trending more Democratic, that could prove problematic for them."

Ros-Lehtinen dismissed the notion that a demographic shift will hurt Republicans. She said she's been hearing the same argument since taking office in 1989 following the death of legendary Democratic congressman Claude Pepper.

"I guess if they repeat it often enough, they might believe it," she said.

Still, the makeup of Ros-Lehtinen's current District 18 illustrates that things may not be the same, anymore. Her district, which stretches from Key West up the coast to the Broward County line, grew by 58,699

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voters since the 2000 census. But 61 percent of the newcomers registered as no party affiliation; 26 percent registered as Democrat; and, Republican registration dropped 3 percent.

The result: a district where Republicans went from a 69,000 vote margin to one where the GOP margin was only 745 voters.

Florida's Republican-led Legislature hit the reset button with the once-a-decade redrawing of political maps and approved a map that strengthens Ros-Lehtinen's staying power. Her newly-drawn district shrinks dramatically in size as she loses the Keys and the more liberal strongholds of Miami Beach, but the district's Republican to Democrat voter advantage climbs ten-fold.

"I'm proud to represent any area that the Legislature gives me," Ros-Lehtinen said last week. She said she will be reluctantly giving up the Keys and Miami Beach but she'll return to representing Hialeah, home to her first state legislative district.

The new proposed maps also help Diaz-Balart, himself a former legislative redistricting chairman. In the last decade, his current District 21 saw a 26 percent increase in registered voters and the Republican to Democrat voter margin of 29,000 voters shrunk to 6,000 votes by 2012.

Diaz-Balart's new district sheds voters in University Park, Kendall and Country Walk. It becomes more rural, moves west over the Everglades, north through Immokalee and up to LaBelle. And the new map gives the congressmen 24,000 more registered Republicans than Democrats.

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Diaz-Balart calls the claims "absolute and total fabrication," saying he hasn't spoken to anyone in the Legislature about making districts more favorable to himself or anyone else — and neither have his staffers.

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"We could see [Rivera] being challenged both in a primary and from whomever the strongest Democrat candidate in South Florida is," said Sean Foreman, Barry Univesity associate political science professor, noting Rivera's the only one of the three to face a challenger, state Democratic Rep. Luis Garcia of Miami Beach.

"But one has to be careful," Foreman added. "David Rivera is a very tough politician and he knows how to mobilize."

Political observers say Miami's congressional delegation will have more Democrats in the next decade, but it will likely remain in the hands of Republicans.

"There's nobody on the bench ready to jump in and take on the Republican juggernaut for Congress," Foreman said.

That juggernaut, Foreman explained, includes Cuban super voters, "older Cuban Americans who are passionate about getting their like-minded representatives in office," who turn out reliably and vote consistently for Cubans. Democrats have a 2-1 registration advantage over Republicans in Miami-Dade, but Cuban super voters have "helped Republicans dominate in local, state and federal elections," he said.

Miami-Dade's population may grow and voter registration may shift, Foreman said, "but the old card of anti-Castro, anti-Cuba still works in 2012."

Miami Herald State and Politics Editor Sergio Bustos contributed to this report.

Posted by Mary Ellen Klas on February 11, 2012 in [David Rivera](#) , [Florida Legislature](#) , [Florida Legislature 2012](#) , [Florida Redistricting](#) , [Ileana Ros-Lehtinen](#) , [Mario Diaz-Balart](#) , [Redistricting](#) | [Permalink](#)

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Ileana Ros-Lehtinen has done such a good job in Congress. The new voters in her district will embrace her. She's genuine and speaks from an informed position.



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However, IMO, her endorsement of Mitt Romney was a tragic occurrence. I have lots of folks who live in or near Massachusetts. We call it Taxachusetts. Can you even imagine how a Republican could get elected as Governor to such a highly Democrat state? Simple - Mitt is no Republican.

However, I forgive you, Congresswoman. You are a great lady. I'm sure the new folks will feel the same. I hope you do well in the next election. You have served your constituency ably.

Posted by: [Janemiami](#) | [February 11, 2012 at 09:58 AM](#)

Ileana may satisfy the needs of her far right constituents. However, it appears that Mario Diaz-Blowhard may have to offer more than his standard campaign promises to go to Havana and beat Castro to death. This guy is possibly the worst fraud elected by Dade Co in the last 30 years.



Posted by: [Can't take anymore](#) | [February 11, 2012 at 10:09 AM](#)

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New congressional districts favor Volusia, Flagler

February 11, 2012 10:43 AM

Sen. John Thrasher, R-St. Augustine, checks the numbers and the map of the redistricting bill during the Senate session Thursday in Tallahassee. (AP | Steve Cannon)

Even as they approved new political boundaries for Florida, legislative leaders were bracing for legal challenges. Sure enough, within minutes of the Senate's final vote this week, the Florida Democratic Party filed a lawsuit while a coalition of voter advocacy groups made plans for their own.



But when the legal wrangling begins, the Legislature's Republican leadership might point to Volusia and Flagler counties as evidence they tried to create compact districts that follow existing city and county borders and don't favor either party.

While there may be plenty to complain about elsewhere in the state, Volusia and Flagler voters largely got what they wanted -- and in Flagler, it could lead to a historic first. The county's 96,000 residents would form the largest voting bloc within the new borders of State House District 24, creating an opportunity for a Flagler resident to represent the area in Tallahassee for the first time in 45 years.

Volusia voters also could see their importance increase. Instead of being divided among six House districts, Volusia would have four, including three wholly contained within the county. The number of Senate districts in the county would decrease from four to three, and the number of congressional districts would go from three to two.

"I think that Volusia County is a winner in this," said Rep. Will Weatherford, the Republican chairman of the House redistricting committee. "Before, you had three members who lived in Volusia and a bunch of other districts grabbing population in different ways. In this way it really follows the county boundaries. It gives you three solid seats and one that comes in from the north and has a little bit of the beach."

Flagler also does well in Weatherford's eyes: "It would probably be the first time a Flagler County representative could run and win in that district."

FOR THE COMPLETE STORY, PICK UP SUNDAY'S DAYTONA BEACH NEWS-JOURNAL.

New lines, old attitudes?

By The Palm Beach Post

Updated: 7:29 p.m. Friday, Feb. 10, 2012

Posted: 7:28 p.m. Friday, Feb. 10, 2012

The best thing about Florida's new congressional and legislative maps is that they are through the Legislature so the court fight can begin soon.

On Thursday, the state Senate approved the House map for what will be Florida's 27 congressional seats, a gain of two. The House basically let the Senate draw its 40 seats, and the Senate basically let the House draw its 120 seats. All the maps need work, but the Senate map is the worst.

These were the first maps drawn after voters passed Amendments 5 and 6, to limit the politics of the line-drawing that follows each U.S. Census. One early effect is that the Legislature didn't drag out its work. Last fall, it seemed that the Legislature might stall well into spring. Given the inevitable court challenge - the first lawsuits were announced Thursday - a final resolution might not have come until just before the June 4 qualifying deadline for federal and state races.

The goal of Amendments 5 and 6 was to keep incumbents from drawing lines to help themselves and their party. The Senate map still shifts a senator not term-limited until 2016 into the district of one whose term is up this year. It keeps Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, the incoming Senate president and chairman of the Reapportionment Committee, from possibly having to run against Sen. Greg Evers, R-Crestview.

The congressional map caused U.S. Rep. Allen West, R-Plantation, to flee slightly more Democratic District 22, which includes parts of Palm Beach and Broward counties, and displace Rep. Tom Rooney, R-Tequesta. Still, some Republicans in Central Florida have stronger districts. Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Miramar, loses the Treasure Coast part of his District 23 but keeps 73 percent of his voters in the new District 20. Rep. Ted Deutch, D-Boca Raton, keeps 76 percent of his District 19 voters in the new District 21. Rep. Rooney keeps just 37 percent of his District 16 voters in the new District 17, but his primary opponent may be a state House incumbent.

And all three maps still cram minority voters into a few districts. The legal battle will focus on whether this practice cuts the overall power of minorities by giving them representatives but requiring few other lawmakers to care about them. Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, said fewer minority lawmakers would amount to "diminishment."

The amendments also called for more compact districts. Rep. Weatherford noted, correctly, that the new maps split far fewer cities and counties. Critics will argue, correctly, that there could be even fewer splits.

Sen. Gaetz argued Thursday that even if the new maps help one party at the expense of another or help incumbents at the expense of challengers, it doesn't matter in the courts unless opponents can prove "intent."

Let's see. The Legislature tried to put competing proposals on the ballot with Amendments 5 and 6. The House spent about \$1.3 million of the public's money challenging the amendments, which the public passed. Last week, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled for the amendments. Now Sen. Gaetz wants Floridians to believe that any failure to comply with the amendments was unintentional. Consider us skeptical.

- Randy Schultz,

for The Palm Beach Post Editorial Board

Democrats, independents tilt Miami's congressional districts

By [Mary Ellen Klas](#) and Erika Bolstad, Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau
[Mary Ellen Klas](#)Erika BolstadTampa Bay Times Posted: Feb 11, 2012 09:30 AM

To understand the demographic shifts of Florida's growing Hispanic vote, you need only look to South Florida, where three congressional districts long dominated by registered Republican voters are being crowded by out by more Democrats and independents.

Tallahassee has taken notice. This week, legislators approved a redistricting plan that would offer safer and stronger districts for Miami's three Cuban-American Republican lawmakers, U.S. Reps. Mario Diaz-Balart, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and David Rivera.

Since 2002, the last time legislators reconfigured the political districts to reflect the new census data, the number of registered voters has soared in their districts.

Growth has been particularly strong among non-Cuban Hispanic voters, the majority of which have registered as independent, no party affiliation or Democrat, political analysts say.

The results have Democrats salivating while Republicans, armed with new maps, remain confident they will retain their stronghold.

"Miami-Dade is not staying with three Republican Congress people," predicts Christian Ulvert, a Miami-based Democratic political consultant. "With Miami's population changes, and the fact that Hispanics tend to be trending more Democratic, that could prove problematic for them."

Ros-Lehtinen dismissed the notion that a demographic shift will hurt Republicans. She said she's been hearing the same argument since taking office in 1989 following the death of legendary Democratic congressman Claude Pepper.

"I guess if they repeat it often enough, they might believe it," she said.

Still, the makeup of Ros-Lehtinen's current District 18 illustrates that things may not be the same, anymore. Her district, which stretches from Key West up the coast to the Broward County line, grew by 58,699 voters since the 2000 census. But 61 percent of the newcomers registered as no party affiliation; 26 percent registered as Democrat; and, Republican registration dropped 3 percent.

The result: a district where Republicans went from a 69,000-vote margin to one where the GOP margin was only 745 voters.

Florida's Republican-led Legislature hit the reset button with the once-a-decade redrawing of political maps and approved a map that strengthens Ros-Lehtinen's staying power. Her newly-drawn district shrinks dramatically in size as she loses the Keys and the more liberal strongholds of Miami Beach, but the district's Republican to Democrat voter advantage climbs ten-fold.

"I'm proud to represent any area that the Legislature gives me," Ros-Lehtinen said last week. She said she will be reluctantly giving up the Keys and Miami Beach but she'll return to representing Hialeah, home to her first state legislative district.

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Rivera's newly drawn district, by contrast, is not as helpful to his political prospects as it is to Diaz-Balart's.

In the last 10 years, Rivera's District 25 — which stretches from Homestead, through Doral and across the peninsula to Naples —grew dramatically. The number of registered voters increased a whopping 41 percent from 2002 to 2012. Most of the new voters — 42 percent of them — registered as independent or no party affiliation. Meanwhile, 36 percent registered as Democrat and 20 percent registered as Republican.

Diaz-Balart held that district until 2010, when he left it to move into the district held by his brother Lincoln Diaz-Balart, who retired after 18 years in Congress. He had seen the trend: in 10 years the Republican voter advantage went from a 21,000-vote margin to a 3,000-vote edge.

The new congressional map gives Rivera a slim 4,000 Republican voter margin and now picks up the Keys. Voters in the district supported John McCain over President Barack Obama by a fraction of a percentage point and supported Gov. Rick Scott over Democratic challenger Alex Sink by an even smaller amount.

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"But one has to be careful," Foreman added. "David Rivera is a very tough politician and he knows how to mobilize."

As for the South Florida House districts now represented by the three Cuban-American Republicans, Foreman and Ulvert both say that in 10 years Miami's congressional delegation will have more Democrats. But, Foreman believes, it "will remain safely Republican for some time."

"It doesn't look good for Democrats partly because of the way the lines are drawn but partly because of the candidates," he said. "There's nobody on the bench ready to jump in and take on the Republican juggernaut for Congress."

That juggernaut, Foreman explained, includes Cuban super voters, "older Cuban-Americans who are passionate about getting their like-minded representatives in office," who turn out reliably and vote consistently for Cubans. Democrats have a two to one registration advantage over Republicans in Miami-Dade but Cuban super voters have "helped Republicans dominate in local, state and federal elections," he said.

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Miami Herald State and Politics Editor Sergio Bustos contributed to this report. Mary Ellen Klas can be reached at meklas@MiamiHerald.com and on Twitter @MaryEllenKlas

New district boundaries need work

They look prettier, but they are not significantly fairer. That is the bottom line on the new congressional and legislative districts approved by the Florida Legislature. Now it will be up to the courts to adjust the lines to ensure the districts meet the intent of the new redistricting rules approved by voters. While the Legislature took a significant step in the right direction, it did not go far enough in drawing districts that better reflect the state's political balance and comply with the state Constitution.

The new maps, particularly those for Congress and the state House, are an improvement over the current districts. That is because in 2010 Florida voters approved constitutional amendments placed on the ballot through a voter petition drive by the nonpartisan group Fair Districts. More than 60 percent of the voters approved Amendments 5 and 6, which require legislators draw districts that do not favor or disfavor incumbents or political parties. The districts have to be compact and follow political and geographic boundaries where possible. And they cannot reduce the ability of minorities to elect the candidates of their choice. After complaining for months that the standards were unworkable, Republican legislative leaders now argue that the new maps meet the requirements. But they could have done more, particularly with the state Senate districts.

How they look

The new districts generally look better and are more compact. The number of counties and cities that are split between districts is significantly reduced on the congressional and legislative maps. The House's redistricting effort, led by Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, was a particularly good-faith effort as more than two dozen state House incumbents wound up sharing districts. The Senate map is the least defensible and appears to be exactly the sort of incumbent protection effort the Constitution now prohibits.

In theory, the new redistricting requirements should have resulted in maps that would produce a congressional delegation and Legislature that better reflect Florida's political balance. After all, Democrats hold an edge in voter registration, and the last three presidential elections have produced an effective tie in 2000, a Republican win and a Democratic win. Yet Republicans now hold 19 of 25 congressional seats, 28 of 40 state Senate seats and 81 of 120 state House seats because of the way the current districts are drawn to protect incumbents and ensure Republican control.

The new districts appear only marginally more competitive. A *Tampa Bay Times* analysis based on previous election results suggests Democrats could pick up three congressional seats, with two other districts competitive. If the new congressional maps meet the constitutional requirements, why would President Barack Obama have won only 10 of the 27 new districts even though he carried Florida in 2008?

Minority districts

The primary reason for the continuing political imbalance and the remaining irregularly shaped districts is that the ability of minority voters to elect the candidate of their choice cannot be reduced. That's why a sprawling congressional district still snakes through eight counties from Jacksonville to Orlando. A version of that district was first drawn 20 years ago and has been represented since then by Rep. Corrine Brown, one of four African-American members of Congress from Florida. And that's why a Tampa Bay district held by Rep. Kathy Castor, who is white, still reaches from downtown Tampa across the mouth of Tampa Bay into southern St. Petersburg. Those districts were originally packed with Democrats, resulting in more heavily Republican neighboring districts. Now legislators say they cannot reduce the minority voting-age population in such packed districts without violating constitutional protections.

To be fair, there are no firm standards to define retrogression, and the courts should be clearer. A commonsense approach would weigh voter performance more than the size of the minority voting-age population. For example, Obama won 70 percent of the vote in Brown's new district and 65 percent of the vote in Castor's. The minority voting-age population in those districts could be reduced — and some of those residents spread to adjoining districts to make those districts more competitive — without diminishing the ability of minority voters to elect the candidate of their choice.

Tampa Bay

Largely because of the minority districts, the metro Orlando and Tampa areas are more carved up than the constitutional amendments would anticipate. The Orlando area is divided into five congressional districts,

including Brown's district and a new Hispanic district. Hillsborough is divided into four congressional districts, yet Castor will still likely be the only member of Congress who will live in the county after the 2012 elections.

Weatherford points out that Castor's new district no longer crosses into Manatee County. And most of the voters in District 15, which covers northeast Hillsborough and western Polk County, live in Hillsborough. But the balance of political power in that district is in Polk, where Republican Rep. Dennis Ross lives. Ross immediately declared his intention to run in District 15 and says he looks forward to getting to know the district that now includes the University of South Florida. It is hard to see how this district unites anyone's common interests except those of Ross and the Republican Party.

The noncompetitive districts in Hillsborough don't just hurt Democrats. Republican Hillsborough County Commissioner Mark Sharpe dropped his plans Friday to run for Congress against Castor after concluding that district is too stacked with Democrats for a Republican to be competitive.

But even more inexplicable is lumping the southeast Hillsborough communities of Fish Hawk and Sun City Center into a sprawling District 17, which covers rural interior counties and stretches across the state to Okeechobee County. Those suburban Hillsborough communities could find themselves represented by Republican Rep. Tom Rooney, who now lives in a Palm Beach County hamlet and plans to run in this district. Imagine Sun City Center residents crossing the headwaters of the Everglades to visit their representative. This is exactly the sort of creative mapmaking that voters were trying to prevent when they approved the constitutional amendments.

While the new congressional and legislative districts are an improvement over the current ones, there is more work to be done. The courts should review the maps carefully, clarify the law and order the necessary adjustments.

Undaunted by Redistricting, John Mica Declares He's Staying Put

By [Alex Goldmark](#)|02/10/2012 – 3:53 pm

Representative John Mica will run in his current, but remapped, Congressional District 7 in central Florida. The nine-term Republican Congressman and current chair of the House Transportation Committee was [dealt a re-election hurdle with Florida's redistricting plan](#) that pitted several formidable Republican candidates against each other. Mica waited until after two others declared in which districts they would run before committing to his own.

“After consultation with my wife Pat, my family and my supporters, I have decided to continue my public service in what constitutes District 7 in the final map approved by the Florida

Legislature, which includes Orange, Seminole and Volusia counties,” Mica said in a statement Friday.

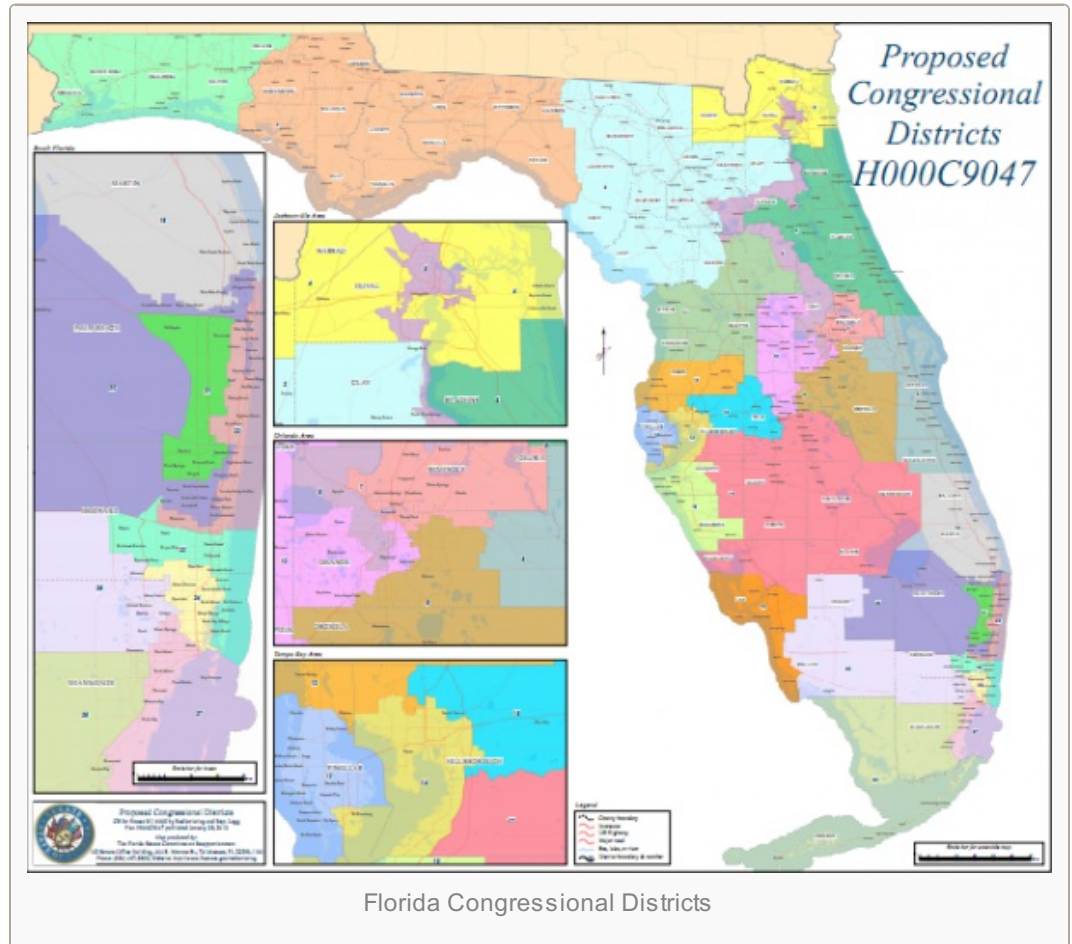
This sets up a potentially tough primary for the top transportation legislator as he will face Sandy Adams of Orlando. She's a first term incumbent who also resides in the [newly formed 7th district](#) and which now includes about 50 percent of her current constituency according to [Sunshine State News](#).

Mica is well funded however, and says he wants to finish work he has underway. “Weighing heavily in this decision were two major factors, first my commitment to significant transportation projects like SunRail for our community and infrastructure for our nation” as well as projects for seniors and veterans.

Mica won reelection in 2010 with 69 percent of the vote.

For more updates on all things central Florida, tune into [WMFE](#). Or see the [maps](#) and [data](#) at the Florida State Senate website.

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Redistricting maps will spur big changes in Central Florida

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By Aaron Deslatte, Tallahassee Bureau Chief
10:01 p.m. EST, February 11, 2012

TALLAHASSEE — There is one undisputed fact in **Florida's** contested redistricting fight: The new legislative and congressional maps lawmakers have approved are destined to make changes large and small to politics across the map.

In Central Florida, the officials elected to go to Washington and **Tallahassee** will likely include more minorities, particularly Hispanics. Longtime House Transportation Chairman **John Mica** of **Winter Park** has been drawn out of his district and will challenge freshman incumbent U.S. Rep. **Sandy Adams** of Orlando in what could be a bruising and costly primary. Other state lawmakers face the same problem.

Both of these realities — greater likelihood of electing minorities, and incumbent **Republicans** forced to run against each other — will be key factors when state courts and the **U.S. Justice Department** evaluate the maps during the next two months to determine whether they comply with federal law and the state's new Fair Districts standards.

Critics, though, point to a third facet of the maps: They are engineered in a way that will virtually assure that **Republicans** remain in the majority in the **Florida Legislature** and the congressional delegation for the next decade.

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"In some of the maps, they have only enhanced the partisan splits," said **Dan Gelber**, general counsel for Fair Districts Now, which pushed the 2010 redistricting overhaul and announced minutes after the maps passed the Legislature that its members would sue to block them.

"We think all the maps are embedded with violations."

But because the 2010 Fair Districts anti-gerrymandering overhaul only prohibits lawmakers from "intentionally" favoring one party over another, proving that **Republicans** gerrymandered to preserve their majorities will be a heavy lift. And **Republicans** insist they followed the law.

"We are not going to engineer any political result: pro-Republican, pro-Democratic or pro-neutral," House Redistricting Chairman **Will Weatherford**, R-Wesley Chapel, said during debate. "That is not the responsibility of this chamber."

Still, the net effect of the new maps is that while congressional and legislative districts become more compact — and fewer cities and counties are divided by district lines — they also become slightly safer for both

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parties on average, according to a Sentinel analysis of voter-registration and voter-performance data.

Statewide, the House maps become more Democratic, shifting from a 76-44 GOP advantage in voter registration to 73-47. That's reversed in the Senate: A 25-15 GOP edge becomes 26-14 under the new maps.

Republican-leaning House seats become 1.2 percentage points more so, on average. Democratic seats get safer, too.

Congressional districts — which will grow from 25 to 27 because of population gains — also become slightly safer for Republicans. One local example is the redrawn seat in Orange and Lake counties held by U.S. Rep. Dan Webster, R-Winter Garden. His current District 8 seat is 39 percent Democratic and 36 percent Republican by registration. But the new one would be 40 percent GOP and 37 percent Democratic — and more importantly, it would shift from one that voted for President **Barack Obama** and Democratic gubernatorial candidate **Alex Sink** to one that voted GOP in both races.

Critics of the Fair Districts changes and academics alike have long maintained that the GOP tilt of Florida's legislative and congressional delegations is based on geographic reality: **Democrats** are more clustered in urban areas, while Republicans are spread across the suburban landscape.

Here's how the new maps could affect you:

Congressional seats

The meandering **Jacksonville**-to-Orlando district held by U.S. Rep. **Corrine Brown**, R-Jacksonville, is virtually unchanged — becoming slightly more black — and was a prime example cited in the Fair Districts challenge.

But the plan's architects countered by pointing to how local Republicans are affected.

Mica, a 20-year incumbent whose current district stretches from his Winter Park home to just south of Jacksonville Beach, loses the safely Republican suburbs of Orange and Seminole counties, which are drawn into the district now represented by Adams, a tea-party favorite. Mica has announced he'll run in that district, and Adams says she won't allow Mica to "bully" her out of it.

Much of Mica's old district has been folded into a new District 6 that runs from Volusia north to St. Johns counties and has already attracted three Republican candidates. Some in Washington think Adams will ultimately decide to run there as well.

The region also gains a new Hispanic-access congressional seat that stretches from Fern Park in eastern Orange through all of Osceola into Polk counties and is likely to elect a Democrat. However, even though it has a voting-age population that's about 42 percent Hispanic, the only announced candidates are former Democratic U.S. Rep. **Alan Grayson**, a non-Hispanic Democrat who lives near **Windermere**, and Republican former Winter Park city Commissioner Karen Diebel, also non-Hispanic.

Senate seats

The black seat in central Orlando, now held by Democrat **Gary Siplin**, will be joined by another — District 12 — that begins west of Orlando and goes as north to Sanford and as far east as **Eatonville**. It will be 42 percent black, about 21 percent Hispanic — and nearly 55 percent Democratic.

Hispanics will have a slight (50.5 percent) majority in another new Senate seat (District 14) that joins southern Orange with much of Osceola County, including **Kissimmee** and **Poinciana**. An additional 14 percent of the voting-age population is black — and 47 percent are registered Democrats.

Creating those two minority districts enabled senators to carve out a new District 10 for Senate Majority Leader **Andy Gardiner**, R-Orlando, that's nearly 73 percent white — and nearly 42 percent Republican. It literally wraps around District 12, running from near downtown Orlando south and then west into **Lake County**, ending near **Leesburg**.

House seats

The shift of House lines in Orange means the county could produce a Democratic-controlled delegation for the first time in more than a decade. There are currently 12 House districts wholly or partially contained within Orange County. All but three are held by Republicans.

Under the new maps, Orange would have nine House seats, including two Hispanic-leaning districts, two black-leaning seats and only three that extend beyond the county line. Four seats would lean Democratic; two could swing to a candidate from either party; and three look to be Republican-leaning because they reach into neighboring Seminole, Lake and Brevard counties.

Rep. Chris Dorworth, a **Lake Mary** Republican slated to be House speaker in 2014, makes out well under the House maps. He would move to District 29, which includes Lake Mary, **Longwood**, **Casselberry** and **Altamonte Springs** in **Seminole County**. The seat is 69 percent white voting-age population, 41.8 percent Republican and 33.6 percent Democratic.

But several of his GOP brethren will find themselves in more competitive seats.

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Rep. Scott Plakon, R-Longwood, currently lives in the district Dorworth plans to run in; he has said he would move into District 30 in southern Seminole and northern Orange counties, including **Maitland**. It is 65.7 percent white — but evenly divided at 38.1 percent Democratic and 37.6 percent Republican.

Two other prominent GOP House members — Eric Eisnagle and Steve Precourt — would both be drawn into the new, Republican-leaning District 44 in Orange County.

Orange County will gain a second black "opportunity" district, District 45, that includes **Pine Hills, Lockhart** and Forest City. It's 40.7 percent black and 18 percent Hispanic. It splits 53.4 percent Democratic and 24.7 percent Republican.

Central Florida would also go from having one Hispanic-leaning House seat in south Orange/northern Osceola that is currently held by Rep. Darren Soto, D-Orlando, to two seats, both strongly Democratic. One (District 48) would run from eastern Orange, east of Semoran Boulevard, to the southern part of the county. The second (District 43) would run through north-central Osceola County to Poinciana.

Both fit roughly within the outlines of the new Hispanic congressional district.

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ancient one at 3:38 PM February 12, 2012

I am thoroughly disappointed. The snake district stretching from Jacksonville to Orlando is still on the map. Fairness in redistricting. I think not. There is no courage in our politicians or somebody promised big bucks at election time.

GRATILOBO at 3:03 PM February 12, 2012

RECENT FLORIDA(the same is elsewhere) VOTING POLES HAVE SHOWN ROMNEY AS LEADING WITH 47% APPROVAL RATE(in reality 7% only), GINGRICH 32% (14%), SANATORUM 14% (32%), AND RON PAUL WITH 7 % APPROVAL RATE WHILE IN REALITY WAS HIGHEST AT 47% !!

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WHEN TAKING IN CONSIDERATION RON PAUL, PRESENTS THIS www.chron.com/news/article/Paul-Immigration-not-solved-by-barbed-wire-guns-2918313.php WHICH BECOMES EXTREME ISSUE WHEN CONSIDERING notethicsbutbutchery.blogspot.com/ FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO STILL REMEMBER GOVERNMENT BRAINWASHING WITH LIE HOW HISPANIC MAN BY THE NAME "JESUS"(sadistic zionist/liberal joke) WAS EXILED FROM USA BACK TO MEXICO

WITH HIS FAMILY AFTER COMPLAINING TO EEOC ABOUT DISCRIMINATION AND JUST TO BE MURDERED WITH USE OF MIND CONTROL WEAPONS !!! TARGETED PERSON WAS WHITE AND I AM STILL ALIVE !!!

Here is the truth myshortbiography.blogspot.com/

US government which consist of Obama alike lawyers(liars), Ron Paul alike doctors, and Gingrich/Sanatorium alike family members of affected(brain disease) individuals who helped pass ILLEGAL bill to target whites.
Why lawyers !!! So HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION can get away with it !! CRIME NO DIFFERENT FROM ROMNEY WHOSE FATHER EXCELLED AFTER GM WAS DELIBERATELY BANKRUPT(USA TODAY) !!

UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2012 ARE FRAUD !! VOID THEM AND DEMAND DAVID DUKE FOR USA PRESIDENT - NOW !!!

NoleJoe at 2:25 PM February 12, 2012

If you let welfare participants vote they will only vote for more welfare. Democrats will kill the Golden Goose that was America by having too many entitlements, too many on the public dole, and too many working for the government. They'll vote Democrat and the liberals will spend us into oblivion. Basically, human nature is greedy and jealous of others who have success and they want to bring them down and they want things they don't deserve. History has proven that all societies eventually fail. We are moving from apathy into dependence and then bondage.

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[EDITORIAL]

Florida Reapportionment: Reject Districts Over Polk

Published: Monday, February 13, 2012 at 12:01 a.m.

With Senate approval Thursday, the Florida Legislature completed its once-a-decade duty of drawing new district boundaries for the U.S. House of Representatives, the Florida Senate and the Florida House of Representatives.

Friday, Attorney General Pam Bondi sent the proposed state districts to the Florida Supreme Court for a required 30-day review.

Lawyers began lining up with lawsuits to challenge the reapportionment plan.

The Florida Democratic Party was ready to roll upon legislative approval Thursday and sued immediately.

The Democrats say the districts violate the Florida Constitution because they do not meet the anti-gerrymandering requirements of the two Fair Districts constitutional amendments approved by voters in 2010.

A lawsuit on similar grounds was prepared for filing by the League of Women Voters of Florida, Hispanic advocacy group The National Council of La Raza, Common Cause Florida and four voters.

SENATE DILUTION IN LAKELAND

Because of a mishmash that splits Lakeland into three Senate districts — inappropriately diluting representation for city residents — the Lakeland City Commission should seek a way challenge the boundaries.

Presumably Lakeland would sue. If the city finds that to be the most effective course of challenge, the Polk County Commission should support Lakeland and join it if appropriate legally.

Lakeland City Attorney Tim McCausland was correct to suggest Jan. 17 that the City Commission consider a challenge.

As he said, "I think they may want to look at reacting to any maps in which Lakeland's clout is marginalized or diluted."

That certainly is true of the Senate district maps.

In Polk County as a whole, four Senate seats replace three. Only one seat is majority Polk vs. two majority-Polk seats now.

FLORIDA HOUSE

By contrast, Florida House seats provide substantial representation for county residents. Polk County retains five House seats.

In four of the seats, Polk has more voters than any other county.

U.S. HOUSE



Thankfully, the House redrew the district map that the Senate had originally approved for the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Senate accepted the House changes.

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As such, the proposed U.S. House districts for Polk are improved, although still diminished in comparison to today's districts.

Four U.S. House districts are proposed vs. three now. None of the districts would be majority Polk.

However, the district held by U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross, R-Lakeland, is much more substantial for Polk than under the original Senate proposal.

Nonetheless, the proposed district contains 41 percent Polk voters rather than the Polk majority it contains now, and Hillsborough County has the most voters in the district.

This seat has been renumbered District 15. It is District 12 now.

The other three U.S. House seats would contain much smaller Polk percentages.

Northeastern District 9 contains 10 percent Polk residents and Northern District 10 contains 17 percent Polk residents.

Both districts are made up mostly of Orange County residents.

Southern District 17 contains 18 percent Polk residents and runs the whole way down to Charlotte County.

Now is the time for the Polk County Commission and cities within the county to evaluate the appropriateness of all the proposed districts that affect them.

Serious consideration should be given to challenging districts that leave Polk residents improperly represented.

Lakeland should use all means available to challenge the proposal to cut the city into three Florida Senate districts.



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« Florida Redistricting: A Look at US House Seats Part 2: 7-15

Florida Redistricting: A Look at US House Seats Part 3: 15-27

This is the third in a series discussing the newly drawn US House district boundaries in Florida. Despite Florida voters passing Amendments Five (State) and Six (Federal) in 2010 (Fair Districts), the new map is rife with partisan gerrymandering. Who cares about the wishes of the people when the RPOF has super majorities? Data for Obama/McCain, Sink/Scott, party registration and racial composition is pulled from the [Orlando Sentinel](#).

DailyKos Elections put together a great grid of information [here](#).

[You can find Districts 1-6 \(North Florida\) here.](#) You can find [Districts 7-15 \(I-4 Corridor\) here](#).

US House District 16: This Sarasota based district is 96% of Republican Representative [Vern Buchanan](#)'s old 13th CD. The balance comes from the old District 11 (Castor). There are a number of affluent coastal communities in this 83.5% white district. Obama fared fairly well with 48% of the vote, Sink less so with

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44%. McCain took 50.8% while Rick Scott took 51.7%. Moderates have struggled challenging Buchanan in the past, with Christine Jennings coming very close in 2006, less so in 2008 despite very strong fund raising. Registration tilts to the Republicans 43.6% to 32.8%.

Buchanan is seeking re-election here with his incredibly deep pockets. In addition to [breaking campaign finance laws](#), Buchanan is an actual used car salesman (he owns a string of dealerships and had a variety of law suits filed against him on related issues). Democratic State Representative [Keith Fitzgerald](#) has announced he will challenge Buchanan. Fitzgerald is a well liked by progressive activists around the state and should make this a race to watch.

US House District 17: This massive chunk of land in the center of south Florida is mostly inland but with a touch of exposure on the Gulf coast. It is a melding of pieces of the old 16th (Rooney-R), 12th (Ross-R) and 14th (Mack-R). Registration is much closer than one might expect, Republicans holding 40.7% and Democrats a healthy 37.7%. Obama performed better than Sink with 43% while both McCain and Scott were just over 55%.

As part of a multi-candidate shuffle, Republican Incumbent Tom Rooney agreed to move in to this district (he lives in the 18th) opening the door for Allen West to take the 18th and Adam Hasner to seek West's 22nd. At this point opposition appears to be limited to a variety of 'some guys'.

US House District 18: This south Atlantic coast district is a pretty decent sized chunk of land that is slightly more friendly for Tea Bagger Incumbent Allen West, but not exactly friendly confines. The composition is 65% of Rooney's old 16th (including his current home), 23% of West's old 22nd, and a 9% slice of Democratic Rep. Alcee Hastings' 23rd. Republicans lead registration 38.0% to 37.3%. Obama won the district 51%-48% and Rick Scott took it 49%-47%. How this seat plays out in 2012 could have a big impact on Florida's Electoral Votes and the Presidential Race as a whole.

Incendiary incumbent Rep. Allen West (lives in Democratic Rep. Debbie Wasserman Shultz 20th district) worked out the three player trade that sent a case of Bud Light Premium and an intern to be named later to Rooney in exchange for Rooney moving to the new 17th, West snagging the new 18th and giving

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Adam Hasner a place to land in the 22nd District in the aftermath of his stillborn US Senate campaign. West was dogged by two aggressive Democratic challengers in the 22nd, one of whom followed him to the 18th, upstart young [Democrat Patrick Murphy](#). Murphy went from 'some guy' to serious player in a very short time, with aggressive progressive messaging and nose to the grindstone fund raising. He boasted \$1.3 Million raised at years end.

2006 Candidate (against Mark Foley) [David Lutrin](#) had already been running for this race prior to the musical chairs, framing himself as a progressive. Lutrin has done nothing thus far to rate consideration beyond 'some guy' status with a year end filing of \$185 raised. There is no K there. No comma. \$185.

Given Allen West's volatility, a strong and (major) error free campaign by a progressive Democrat could certainly pick this seat up in 2012.

US House District 19: Southern Gulf coast including Fort Myers and Naples, composed almost entirely (98%) from Republican Representative Connie Mack IV's old 14th District. This is among the most Republican districts in the state, with a 47% to 28% in registration and with Rick Scott posting a healthy 61%. Obama fared a bit better than Sink, losing 56.8% to 42.3% to McCain while Sink was ~35% against Scott's 61%. Racially the seat is nearly 15% Hispanic and 6% Black, it is possible that over the decade those numbers will both grow, putting this seat closer to competition.

Incumbent Republican Connie Mack IV is seeking the Republican nomination to face Bill Nelson for US Senate leaving this seat open and somewhat of a free for all...as long as you are a Republican. Thus far none of the 'some guys' have really distinguished themselves, though at least three are in the ballpark of \$100,000 raised.

US House District 20: This inland West Palm Beach/Fort Lauderdale seat is serious nothing to see here territory. Democrats lead registration 65% to 14% in this 48.9% Black, 18.5% Hispanic seat. Obama won by a paltry 61% margin – 80% to 19%, Alex Sink only won 78%-20%. This is a majority minority seat,

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which is how the Republicans justify drawing a district with more nooks and crannies than anything Thomas's makes. It isn't as bad as the 5th CD, but it is pretty awful.

Democratic incumbent Representative [Alcee Hastings](#) will seek re-election, he will win. At least that is what my magic 8-ball says.

US House District 21: This seat snugs inside the embrace of District 20, another safe Democratic seat with a 48%-26% registration advantage. Both Obama and Sink cleared 60%. This district includes 76% of [Democratic Representative Ted Deutch](#) old 19th district and 15% of what was West's 22nd district.

Deutch is seeking re-election and should coast, regardless of how many 'some dudes' jump in.

US House District 22: Completing the ménage à trois with the 20th and 21st, this district hugs the Atlantic coastline of Palm Beach. Democrats hold a 41.5% to 32.6% registration advantage and the Obama 56.7% to 42.5% victory were too tough for Incumbent Republican Allen West, who yet again ran like a coward to more friendly confines. If he keeps this up, he will still be living in the 23rd District represented by Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Shultz and running in southern Georgia.

For roughly the past year, former Palm Beach Mayor Lois Frankel and Patrick Murphy (see District 18) have been working hard, raising money and poking West with sharp sticks, scooping roughly \$1.3 Million each in 2011. Murphy has now moved on to the 18th, and Frankel has been joined by Broward Commissioner Kristin Jacobs with rumors of other potential candidates enticed by the open seat.

Republican [Adam Hasner](#), former State House Majority Leader, abandoned his going-nowhere US Senate campaign to announced for this seat immediately after West announced intent to seek the 18th. He may face a primary challenge from Broward County Commissioner [Chip LaMarca who has launched an exploratory committee](#).

The numbers here are extremely favorable, barring a major catastrophe, whichever Democrat wins the primary should coast to a win in November despite Hasner's formidable stature.

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A look at new seats in North Florida

US House District 23: Miami Beach up through Hollywood with a tail inland at the northern end of the district. Registration is 48.5% for Democrats, 25% Republicans, so this is another 'nothing to see here' seat. Obama and Sink again both broke 60%.

Incumbent Democratic Congresswoman and DNC Chairwoman [Debbie Wasserman Shultz](#) holds this seat, and she ain't going nowhere despite a field of 'some guys' lined up to challenge her.

US House District 24: Miami's majority-minority seat, this seat includes Miami Gardens, North Miami and Opa-Locka. 51.7% Black and 33% Hispanic, this seat holds the distinction of the smallest White population in the state at 12.6%. Obama and Sink both scored in the neighborhood of 85%, incumbent Democratic Representative Frederica Wilson is likely to coast to re-election until she decides to move on, just as Kendrick Meek and Carrie Meek before her.

US House District 25: A large geographic footprint, this district includes a bit of the Everglades, Big Cypress National Preserve and a huge Hispanic population at 71%. Republicans hold the registration lead 40% to 32% and a moderate performance lead with McCain beating Obama 54%-46% and Scott over Sink by a slightly wider 57%-41%.

Incumbent Republican Representative Mario Diaz-Balart abandoned his old 25th CD seat in 2010 to seek the more friendly seat of his retiring brother Lincoln Diaz-Balart. In a strange twist, he gets the old number back along with 34% of his old seat and 51% of his current district. 'Some guy' [Democrat Shannon Richard Harvilla](#) of Pompano Beach is challenging Diaz-Balart.

US House District 26: The tip of the state and the Keys, this is one of the most competitive districts in the state. Voter registration runs tight, Republicans at 36.8%, Democrats at 35.7%. McCain edged Obama 49.9% to 49.5%. Scott and Sink was even closer at 49.0% to 48.76%. This seat is majority Hispanic at 69%.

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First term incumbent Republican [David Rivera](#) wasted no time getting caught up in a variety of scandals. Which isn't news considering his [use of a vehicle to crash his way to victory](#) in the State Legislature years ago...

[Democratic State Representative Luis Garcia](#) announced last summer he would challenge Rivera. The combination of Rivera's anemic fund raising as an incumbent and Garcia's decent fund raising has eliminate the money gap, but that is certainly subject to change given how low the numbers currently are on both sides.

A variety of 'some guys' are either in or rumored to be considering a run.

US House District 27: Miami, South Miami and Coral Gables, this is another very competitive seat. Registration tilts 38.2% to 35.8% in favor of the Republicans and this is also a majority Hispanic seat at 75%. McCain edged Obama 50.9% to 48.5% and Scott beat Sink 50.6% to 47.5%.

Incumbent Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen has proven to be a formidable opponent, over performing statewide Republican candidates by 10%.

Possibly the best hope for a progressive victory here is a rematch with [2008 nominee Annette Taddeo](#). Taddeo's 2008 campaign under performed significantly, weighed down early by State/National Party rejection, Taddeo didn't really find her feet until the final weeks of the campaign. She quickly became a favorite of progressive activists around the state. Taddeo could also be a viable candidate in the adjacent 26th District.

Summary of Districts 16-27: In the territory south of the I-4 Corridor, there are a great deal of opportunities for Democratic (Progressive) pick ups in 2012 and/or over the next few cycles. Obama's South Florida GOTV operation was incredible in 2008, but in far too many cases they were 1-shot voters, ignoring the under card – leaving challengers like Taddeo, Joe Garcia and Raul Martinez well short of Obama's vote totals in their districts. If OFA 2.0 can work out those kinks, the new map could yield some significant gains in 2012 starting with 18 and 22. 16, 26 and 27 are the next best targets here, with the new maps making all of these seats virtual toss ups IF quality candidates/campaigns emerge.

Currently this block is 7R-4D-1NNew, with an aggressive effort it is reasonable to see 4 gains for progressive Democrats, moving the block to 4R-8D over the next 2-3 cycles. Long term, as with the I-4

Corridor, minority population growth should diminish the slim Republican margins gerrymandered in to the map.

Statewide we could see as many as 10 more Democratic Members of Congress over the next 2-3 cycles. From 19R-6D to 11R-16D, quite a swing. Will the Florida Democratic Party do the necessary infrastructure building, recruitment and training to get this done? Will they commit to a 67-County strategy putting statewide candidates in a better chance to win? Or will they stick to the 2010 (and previous cycles) strategy of putting all of their eggs in a single statewide candidate's basket and hope they don't get smashed?

2012	Adam Hasner	Alex Sink	Allen West	Annette Taddeo	Barack Obama	Bill Nelson	Connie Mack IV
David Lutrin	David Rivera	Debbie Wasserman Shultz	DWS	Fair Districts	Florida	Florida Democratic Party	
Frederica Wilson	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen	John McCain	Keith Fitzgerald	Lois Frankel	Luis Garcia	Mark Foley	
ménage à trois	Patrick Murphy	Recruiting Candidates	redistricting	Rick Scott	Ted Deutch	Tom Rooney	
Training	Vern Buchanan						

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Breaking down the Florida GOP's redistricting map

By [Aaron Blake](#),

Florida Republicans have apparently settled on a new congressional map they hope will help them cement their overwhelming majority in the state's delegation for a decade to come.

While the state's GOP lawmakers have been tossing around a series of proposals for the past few weeks, sources tell The Fix that they have settled on a map that is expected to pass out of the state legislature in the coming days. (The map can be viewed [here](#).)

We stress that this is not the final product, and whatever the GOP winds up passing will be subject to review under the state's new redistricting laws, which Democrats hope will invalidate the GOP map. But it's worth a look at what the GOP is trying to do.

Here's a brief recap. (And be sure to check out our updated [Redistricting Scorecard](#).)

* Open seats

With the state gaining two seats thanks to population increases, the map creates one solidly Republican seat (the 17th) in the Everglades region and one Democratic-leaning seat (the 9th) just south of Orlando.

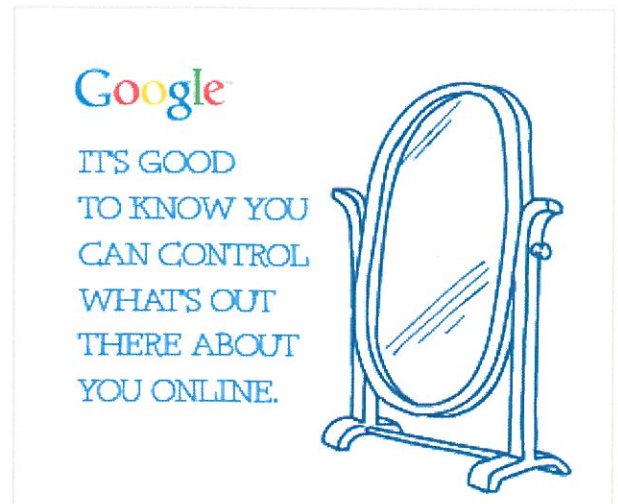
The Democratic leaning seat would have gone 60 percent for **President Obama** in the 2008 election but also would have gone narrowly for **President Bush** in 2004, suggesting it's not unwinnable for the GOP.

In addition, Rep. **Connie Mack**'s (R-Fla.) decision to run for Senate left his seat open. Formerly labeled the 14th district, it is now the 19th and is safely Republican.

* Who gets help?

The winners on this map are Republican Reps. **Dan Webster**, **Sandy Adams** and **Mario Diaz-Balart**. All hail from competitive districts but are looking safer now.

Webster and Diaz-Balart's districts (renumbered the 10th and 25th) both get about five points more



Republican and should be tough for Democrats to pursue.

Adams is drawn into the 7th district with Rep. **John Mica** (R), but the two have already worked it out, and Mica will run in the neighboring 6th district instead. Adams's district gets one or two points better for the GOP.

* **Who gets hurt?**

Because the GOP has such a huge majority of seats in a swing state — 19 of 25, to be exact — shoring up all 19 of those members was a difficult task. And that means some Republicans see their districts get tougher under the new map.

Rep. Allen West (R-Fla.) gets a tougher district under a new redistricting plan crafted by his fellow Florida Republicans. (J. Scott Applewhite/Associated Press)

Case in point are Reps. **Tom Rooney** and **Allen West**. Both of their South Florida districts got about four points more Democratic, which should make life significantly tougher for each of them. Rooney now has a more compact swing seat (the 18th) north of West Palm Beach, while West's already Democratic-leaning 22nd district just south of Rooney's became even more Democratic and will be tough for him to hold.

West has been a very outspoken tea party freshman and has raised huge money, but line-drawers don't appear to have done him many favors. His district, as constructed, would have gone about 43 percent for the last two Republican presidential nominees.

Both men appear to have options, though. Rooney could run in the new 17th, which includes much of his current territory in the Everglades, while there has been some talk of West running across the state in Mack's district. (Though West has shown no interest in this.)

Other Republicans who see their districts getting slightly less friendly include Reps. **Steve Southerland**, **Vern Buchanan** and **David Rivera**. Buchanan actually gains registered Republicans and retains the vast majority of his current district — both positives for him — but the performance of his district moves about a point towards Democrats.

All three are still districts that voted for Sen. **John McCain** (R-Ariz.) in 2008, though.

* **Other decisions**

We mentioned above that Adams and Mica need to sort things out, and they're not the only ones.

Republican Reps. **Rich Nugent** and **Cliff Stearns** need to figure out who will run in the 11th, where they both live, and who will run in the 3rd. The 3rd is the safer seat.

Meanwhile, Rivera technically lives in the 25th district and Diaz-Balart technically in the 26th, but they are expected to swap districts to run in areas that more closely reflect their current districts. In addition, Rivera's new 26th will pick up the Florida Keys from the third Cuban-American Republican in South Florida, Rep. **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen**.

* **Bottom line**

Republicans have crafted a map on which they at least have a chance to win both new seats and hold all of their current seats, which would give them a 21 to 6 advantage in the delegation.

That would require of a lot of things breaking their way, though.

Winning the new 9th district south of Orlando will be very hard, and West's reelection — despite his very strong fundraising — will be difficult as well.

In addition, Republicans still have to defend swing seats held by Rooney and Rep. **Bill Young** (R-Fla.) when Young retires. And several other seats won't be completely safe, including Southerland's, Adams's, Buchanan's and Rivera's. Rivera, in particular, has struggled with ethics problems and could pay a price.

Indeed, Democrats have a good chance to pick up seats in 2012 in Florida despite the GOP drawing the map, and it wouldn't be surprising to see them narrow the gap in the state's delegation come January 2013.

Is this the final map?

All of the above should have a giant asterisk next to it, because all of it is subject to review and must comply with the state's [new redistricting laws](#) (mentioned above).

Democrats are likely to challenge the map in court, and if they're successful and the courts find that the Florida GOP violated the new laws, they could blow the map up in a way that might allow Democrats to win several seats.

So keep an eye on the legal battle. The GOP's overwhelming advantage in the state's delegation — and, by extension, its majority in the U.S. House — may depend on it.

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FAQ: Your redistricting questions answered

February 15, 2012 12:05 AM

The Legislature approved maps last week that will reshape Florida politics for the next decade and reshuffle political lineups in Volusia and Flagler counties.

This is a complicated and confusing process that demands the awesome clarifying powers of Frequently Asked Questions:

Whose district am I in?

Just because a particular question is the most frequently asked doesn't mean it's a good Frequently Asked Question. It's just called that. You need a voter ID card, a road map and a GPS receiver to know which legislative district you vote in.

To make it more confusing, many districts are renumbered and incumbents are moving around.

Is this finally a done deal?

Nope. It's now in the courts.

The Florida Supreme Court will hear arguments at the end of the month. The League of Women Voters, La Raza, Common Cause Florida and others have filed objections.

What's their big objection?

That the maps violate the Fair Districting Amendment by wandering all over the place.

The amendment says districts need to be reasonably compact. Yet the 5th U.S. House District -- similar to the current 3rd District -- covers 150 miles, eight counties and parts of Orlando, Jacksonville, Gainesville and the Ocala forest. There's a spot near Orange Park where it narrows to about 400 feet.

The suit calls it "grotesquely misshapen," which is hard to argue with on aesthetic grounds.

Are Volusia and Flagler counties' congressional maps similarly messed up?

Surprisingly, no. Volusia and Flagler will share a reasonably compact U.S. House district.

Volusia is used to being carved up. But except for having Deltona-DeBary-Cassadaga amputated, this area survived the process.

But now that this area is the center of things, both of Volusia's out-of-town U.S. representatives will desert us for other districts rather than live among us.

It's easy to feel unwanted.

Is Rep. John Mica really moving after all these years?

After serving almost 20 years, the Republican with a convincing smile and unconvincing hairpiece will move west to the new Seminole County-Deltona district.

And look at this! They named it "District 7," so he won't have to buy any new door signs.

Sandy Adams, R-Orlando, Volusia's other out-of-town representative, also is interested in the seat.

I hear some House districts choose between candidates from more than one political party; will that happen here?

No sign so far. Rumors that a group calling itself "the Florida Democratic Party" will field candidates cannot be confirmed locally.

What district is the Palm Coast Monkey in?

District 6. But he remains outside the grasp of either animal control officers or political parties. Stay independent, Palm Coast Monkey!

Cliff Stearns Faces Four-Way GOP Primary in Redrawn Congressional District

Drawn out of his current district, U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns still figures to have an advantage in his re-election run this year.

Just don't tell that to fellow Republicans trying to knock him out in the party primary.

With 12 terms in office and \$2.38 million in the bank, the veteran GOP congressman has the power of incumbency and money behind him.

And though his Ocala home is now south and east of the newly designed 3rd Congressional District, nearly 70 percent of his old district remains within the new CD 3.

The first congressman in Florida to qualify for the ballot by petition this year, Stearns said he supports the look of the new district and is shopping for a home there.

"While District 3 includes western Marion County, it does not include Ocala which was divided into two congressional districts 10 years ago," Stearns notes. "I'm pleased that the new maps finally put the city back into one district, something that both the city and I encouraged the Legislature to do."

But the new district -- which stretches to the Georgia border and encompasses all or parts of Dixie, Levy, Gilchrist, Lafayette, Suwannee, Columbia, Hamilton, Madison, Union, Bradford, Clay, Alachua and Marion counties -- has opened the door for other Republicans to challenge Stearns.

State Sen. Steve Oelrich, R-Gainesville, benefits from the new boundaries, which embrace 63 percent of his current district.

Seven of the counties in CD 3 lie within Oelrich's current district. The largest of them, Alachua County, is Oelrich's home, where he was elected the first Republican sheriff since Reconstruction and served 14 years.

He has since been elected twice to the state Senate, where he has taken tough conservative stands on issues ranging from the budget to illegal immigration.

And knocking down persistent rumors that he would bow out of the race in deference to Stearns -- who won re-election with 71 percent of the vote in 2010 -- Oelrich declared, "I will campaign in every county, city and community throughout North Central Florida."

Still, the rumors persist. One well-connected GOP consultant, who declined to be identified by name, predicted, "Oelrich will not run against Stearns. This will end up being a fairly easy win for Stearns."



Around the State

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At least two other Republicans -- veterinarian Ted Yoho and Clay County Clerk of Courts James Jett -- appear to be in for the long haul.

Yoho, the first resident of the district to enter the race, sounds an outsider's tone, saying, "As a small-business owner and large-animal veterinarian, I have a different perspective than the career politicians.

"Unlike the entrenched politician, I have been in the trenches on a daily basis for the last 28 years. Like too many Americans, I have been on the receiving end of the garbage legislation coming out of Washington," the first-time office seeker said. "We need more business sense and common sense in Washington, and that's what I can bring."

Zeroing in on Stearns, Yoho said, "After a quarter century in Congress, he has failed to chair a major committee. He's done too little, too late."

Jett has been Clay County's clerk of courts since 1998 and was a three-term Clay County commissioner before that.

While Yoho and Oelrich see Gainesville and Alachua as their power base, Jett is more geographically remote, living and working on the far eastern edge of the district.

Still, strongly Republican Clay County accounts for a sizable share of CD 3's GOP voters -- and that could work to Jett's advantage.

Jett did not respond to repeated phone calls from Sunshine State News.

In an era of anti-incumbent sentiment, Yoho could get traction against three longtime officeholders.

"Ted Yoho more closely represents the values of the tea party," said Paula Helton, of the Gainesville Tea Party.

Though her group does not endorse candidates, Helton said Yoho "shares tea party values of limited government and fiscal responsibility. He will bring a fresh perspective to Washington with his experience in actually running a small business."

Whoever emerges from the August primary, the district -- which is 59 percent Republican -- looks to be a GOP stronghold for years to come.

Some Stearns' skeptics wonder what voters in the new district will think of his now-defunct pledge to serve only eight years in Congress.

Stearns maintains that his Capitol Hill experience has benefited constituents, and believes it will naturally carry over to the new district.

"I look forward to the opportunity to continue to represent the University of Florida, Santa Fe College and the Veterans Hospital in Gainesville," the congressman said.

As a senior member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Stearns was instrumental in securing support for the construction of the new VA Patient Bed Tower in Gainesville.

"I also look forward to building a strong relationship with the VA Medical Center in Lake City and its health-care professionals," Stearns said.

To bolster his primary bid, Stearns is bringing in House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, on March 2 to speak at a campaign reception in Orange Park.

"Stearns will have money and discipline. Oelrich will have more heat. Advantage, Cliff -- but don't write off Oelrich due to the tweaks in the district," said a Tallahassee-based GOP strategist, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Geoff Ross, a tea party leader, applauded Stearns for being "strong on the Second Amendment with the passing of his Right to Carry Reciprocity Act."

But Ross said former Sheriff Oelrich "has a stronger following" in the new district, and called him "a powerful force to reckon with."

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