

Redistricting has northwest Kansas with two incumbents

By Kevin Bottrell

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Maps drawn by federal judges in Kansas City left the state House and Senate districts covering the northwest corner of Kansas with two incumbents, sending the House district that once served Goodland and Colby to Olathe.

Maps proposed in the Legislature would have avoided the head-to-head election matchups, but none of them was ever passed. A fight over control of the Senate between conservative and moderate Republicans left the redistricting process up to the courts.

That means Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, a long-time incumbent Republican from Grinnell, and Sen. Allen Schmidt, a Hays Democrat, both now live in Ostmeyer's 40th District, which shrinks from 17 counties to 13 1/2 but now takes in Democratic-leaning Hays.

The 121st District shifts to Johnson County, where population continues to grow. The 120th, which had run from Cheyenne to Phillips counties along the Nebraska line, now takes in Goodland and Colby, throwing Republican representatives Rick Billinger of Goodland and Ward Cassidy of St. Francis into a primary race.

"This is bad for Kansas," Sen. Ostmeyer said Wednesday, summing up the opinions of many officials toward the redistricting maps handed down by three federal judges late last week. "I'm tremendously disappointed. We're elected to do this job, and we failed."

While the House had a map done and approved quickly, he said, the Senate didn't even start until late in the session. The process got bogged down in the fight between conservatives and moderates.

When the session ended, several days over the usual 90-day limit, no new legislative maps had been approved. The process went before three federal judges, who issued their opinion, along with new maps, on June 7.

Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt could appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. Billinger said the attorney general hasn't given any indication that he plans to do so.

"I'd love to see them appeal it," he added.

Ostmeyer said he doesn't think the case will be appealed.

Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach has announced that the filing deadline, which was noon Monday, will not be extended, and the primary election will go forward as scheduled on Tuesday, Aug. 7. Across the state, many candidates had to refile and others jumped into races, based on the new maps.

Both the House and Senate districts are drastically different from the current layout. The old 120th included Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton and Phillips counties. The old 121st included Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan and Graham counties.

With the 121st moved, the new 120th includes Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Sherman, Wallace and the northwest part of Thomas County, including Colby. The rest of Thomas as well as Sheridan and Graham counties are now in the 118th, represented by Don Hine-man of Dighton. Norton and Phillips counties are now in the 110th District, which runs down to Hays.

It's a far cry from what Rep. Billinger thought he would be contending with.

"It's appalling that three judges from Kansas City were the ones to decide the western Kansas districts," he said.

The House passed a map in just three days with more than 110 votes, Billinger said, but the judges didn't even use it as a reference point. That map, he said, got the population numbers within a few percentage points of the ideal, and it took care not to put incumbents together.

This new map pits 23 incumbents against each other and created 25

districts that suddenly had no incumbent. In many cases, Billinger said, there hadn't been anyone filed in those new districts. After Thursday's announcement, party officials scrambled to find candidates for them before the Monday deadline.

Both Billinger and Cassidy have much of their old districts. All that remains are from the old 120th are three counties, Cheyenne, Decatur and Rawlins. Another example, he said, is the new 106th District, which pits Rep. Clay Aurand of Bellville against Rep. Sharon Schwartz of Washington. The two had been in neighboring districts before the judges issued the new map.

Both Billinger and Cassidy said they expect their primary to be a friendly campaign.

"Ward's a friend of mine, has been for many years," Billinger said. "Neither of us wanted to run against each other, but circumstances have thrown us together."

Cassidy said it is not a nice scenario. He had been campaigning across five counties, then suddenly two of those were taken away and new ones added.

"When the legislature draws a map, they favor incumbents," he said. "We were told that if the judges were to do it, they wouldn't care."

Cassidy estimated that in both houses there would likely be a minimum of 50 new legislators. The House will also be electing a new speaker, since the incumbent, Mike O'Neal, is not running for re-election.

Cassidy said his decision to continue running was due in part to being on the House Appropriations Committee during the last session.

"I was told I have a good chance of being on it next session and I also have a chance of being educational budget chairman," he said.

Cassidy said that gaining that amount of influence would allow him to do good things for western Kansas.

One way or the other, either Billinger or Cassidy won't be heading back to Topeka for next year's session.

"Both of us look out for western Kansas," Billinger said. "It's tragic that two good voices for western Kansas are pitted against each other."

The 40th Senate District is in the same boat. The redrawn district includes Wallace, Logan, Gove, Trego, Ellis, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Graham, Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton and half of Phillips county — not including the city of Phillipsburg.

The old district boundaries stopped at Trego County and extended south to Greeley, Wichita, Scott, Lane and Ness counties. It also included Rooks County. To make up for losing these six counties, the district picked up half of Phillips County and Ellis, including the city of Hays.

"It'll all work out," Ostmeyer said. "Ellis County is a rural area, it's got small schools and a college I support."

Having Hays in the district does change the dynamic though. Ostmeyer said that Hays holds 33 percent of the new district's population, and a Democratic incumbent, Schmidt, a Hays resident who had been in the 36th District, now is in the 40th.

"Schmidt and I are very good friends," Ostmeyer said. "We talked during the session, and he told me that if we were put in the same district that he might not run. When we talked about it over this weekend, I told him to do what he needed to do."

Schmidt announced Monday that he has filed to run in the 40th. He lost nine of his 10 counties, which he said represents a huge challenge.

"The job is not finished and neither is my service to rural Kansas," he said in a press release. "Representing rural Kansas is a responsi-

bility I take as conscientiously as I did my senior leader duties in the Army. It has been a privilege to represent the needs and values of rural Kansas these past two years and that responsibility has required firmly standing up to keep our rural representation against efforts to take away yet another rural western district because of population shifts."

Schmidt is a one-term senator. He spent 32 years in the Army Medical Service before retiring as a colonel. He and his wife spent 12 years operating a dairy and he currently works as a business development manager for the Columbia Group.

Ostmeyer also has to run in the primary against John Miller, a long-time Norton County commissioner.

Including Ostmeyer and Schmidt, six incumbent senators have been pitted against each other. Ostmeyer said the Senate has no one to blame but itself.

"The judges punished us," he said.

Ostmeyer said he suspected the conservative wing of the party has been hurt worse by the maps, but it is too early to tell.

"I still see that rift being there," he said.

The judges also issued maps for the Kansas Congressional districts and the state Board of Education.

The 1st Congressional District only picked up a little territory, and now has far fewer than the old count of 69 counties. Junction City will be reunited with neighboring Fort Riley, and the district will now include Manhattan.

To even out the populations, the 4th District will pick up some rural counties in south central Kansas. To make up for losing Manhattan, the 2nd District will pick up the rest of Nemaha County and most of Marshall County in the north, Montgomery County in the south, and part of Douglas County. However it will lose part of Miami County to the 3rd District.

In the final opinion, the Court said it is satisfied that its plans meet the legal requirements for redistricting.

"The Court recognizes that because it has tried to restore compact contiguous districts where possible, it is pushing a re-set button; its maps look different from those now in place," the opinion says. "Some changes may not be popular and some people — perhaps many — will disagree that the Court has struck the appropriate balance."

The three judges in the case were Kathryn Vratil, chief judge of the U.S. District Court in Kansas City, appointed by President George H.W. Bush in 1992.; Mary Breck Briscoe, chief judge of the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1995; and Senior U.S. District Judge John Lungstrum, also a George H.W. Bush appointee.

Student graduates

Tia Sager of Bird City, Kan., was one of 139 students who graduated from Sterling College located in Sterling, Kan. On May 12, Sager received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration of Leadership Management. Sager is the daughter of Doug and Tina Sager.

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HULDA DORSCH was showing her two granddaughters, Erika and Melissa Dorsch, the senior center and stopped to show them how she exercises.

Granddaughters visit Bird City

Erika and Melissa Dorsch were in Bird City visiting their grandmother Hulda Dorsch. The two girls are daughters to Tom and Marcy Dorsch who have been on staff for 30 years with Campus Crusade for Christ. They are presently in Neger, West Africa.

Erika Dorsch lives in Whitewa-

ter, and was born in Bangui, Central African Republic. She came to live in the United States in 2005, and is presently a junior in college at Hesston College where she is studying nursing.

Melissa Dorsch lives in Rennes, France and was born in Iowa. She is on staff with Campus Crusade

for Christ.

They have a brother Andrew Dorsch who was born in France, and lives in Minnesota, and one other sister, Lindsay, who was born in Bangui, Central African Republic and teaches high school French at Emporia High School.

Three quotes submitted for trade-in price of new skid loader for city

By Norma Martinez

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On Monday, June 4, the Bird City City Council discussed the purchase of new equipment.

Shannon Ambrosier, councilman, submitted three quotes for the trade-in price of a new skid loader; with Yost Farm Supply, Saint Francis, being the lowest at \$16,050.

Brad Schneider, maintenance supervisor, reiterated that the current skid loader and bucket attachment are shot. With the amount of money already spent on repairs, he said, the city could have bought a new one. Councilman Wade Carmichael agreed that the skid loader is the one piece of equipment employees use every day and if it were to break down, the city would be in trouble.

"We can't just stick our head in the sand," he said.

Ambrosier agreed that it's a difficult decision to spend the money, but that it's a purchase that needs to be made.

Mayor Troy Burr explained that there are funds available in the City's Equipment Fund that can only be spent on equipment; therefore, the purchase will not take away from other city priorities. Council members unanimously agreed to approve the purchase of the skid loader from Yost Farm Supply.

Charging process set

Clerk DeAnza Ambrosier asked for clarification on the city's vendor charging process. She explained that she had been receiving invoices from vendors with different charge signatures on the receipts, including council members and non-council city commit-

tee members. She explained that allowing anyone to sign for city purchases without prior approval could leave the city open to repetitive or unnecessary spending and suggested the council specifically authorize only certain employees/individuals access to city funds through purchasing.

Councilman Sager explained that he has purchased items needed for the Maintenance Department when he is going to Goodland or other places where needed items are sold. He said he feels he is saving the city money by saving employees a trip.

Councilman Carmichael agreed that the authority to charge purchases to the city should be limited; however he is okay with council members and/or committee members to do so. Councilman Frank Serrano said he thinks it should be restricted to only city employees.

Following further discussion,

council members agreed to authorize the charging of purchases only to council members, committee members, the pool manager, the city treasurer, and full-time city employees.

Clerk Ambrosier asked if council members and maintenance employees have been making every attempt to buy locally, as she noticed some items purchased in Goodland or Atwood may have been available in Bird City or Saint Francis. Schneider responded that he does take that into consideration.

July meeting

Mayor Burr discussed the possibility of rescheduling the July Council meeting due to harvest as has been done in the past. However, council members agreed that harvest should not conflict with the July meeting this year. The next meeting of the Bird City City Council will convene at 7 p.m. on July 2.

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Thank You

Words cannot express our deep gratitude for the many kindnesses shown in the loss of our husband, father and grandfather, Coy DeGood.

Thank you to all who sent cards and flowers; brought food, offered kind words and hugs.

Thank you Pastor Warren for the beautiful words spoken at the memorial service; and Lanissa for your precious gift of song.

Thank you Methodist women for providing refreshments and Knodel Funeral Home for caring and compassionate arrangements.

We are warmed by the out pouring of love from those whose lives he touched.

The family of Coy DeGood