

New redistricting maps show South Bay losing seats

By Art Marroquin Staff Writer

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Proposed redistricting maps released Friday would dramatically alter the face of the South Bay's political landscape, eliminating two of the region's congressional districts and once again linking the Palos Verdes Peninsula to its coastal neighbors.

The congressional district held by Republican Rep. Dana Rohrabacher would be completely contained in Orange County, forfeiting the Palos Verdes Peninsula to the neighboring district once represented by Rep. Jane Harman.

The new lines drawn by the California Citizens Redistricting Commission, based on 2010 census figures, also call for excising Carson from the district represented by Democratic Rep. Laura Richardson. That city would move into the area represented by Rep. Maxine Waters, who would forfeit Westchester and Playa del Rey under the new political boundaries.

The California Citizens Redistricting Commission's first draft maps released Friday carve out completely new congressional and legislative boundaries across the state. The panel is required to approve final maps by Aug. 15.

The 14-member commission, created in 2008 when voters approved Proposition 11, used public testimony and the new U.S. census data to develop new congressional and state Senate, Assembly and Board of Equalization districts.

"The way that the Legislature and Congress drew the South Bay area in 2001 became one of the poster children of why redistricting needed to be reformed," said Kathay Feng, executive

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director of California Common Cause, a nonprofit government watchdog group based in Los Angeles.

Political considerations were barred from the commission's work in an attempt to end gerrymandered districts across the state.

As a result, the upside-down question mark shape of state Sen. Roderick Wright's district could get straightened out.

The commission also called for chopping off the so-called "Oropeza finger," an odd appendage that included the Long Beach home of the late state Sen. Jenny Oropeza, whose seat is now held by Democrat Ted Lieu of Torrance.

But the oddly shaped, extremely long congressional district held by Rohrabacher took the political cake, Feng said, by stretching from Huntington Beach, narrowing into a shoestring through southern Long Beach and ballooning at the other end to encompass the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

"There wasn't anybody to argue that these areas didn't share any interests other than a hand-picked incumbent who would be reassured re-election," Feng said. "Thanks to the commission, you will no longer see those strange fingers and curlicues that were drawn into districts to accomplish representatives and their successors."

Under the commission's proposal, the Palos Verdes Peninsula would be moved into a congressional district that stretches from San Pedro to Santa Monica.

If approved, the area would encompass the homes of Republican Craig Huey and his Democratic challenger, Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who are running for the congressional seat vacated when Harman stepped down earlier this year.

Huey does not live within the district's current boundaries. Neither candidate could be reached for comment about the proposed maps.

"That's a huge coastal seat that still appears to lean Democratic," said Allan Hoffenblum, a former GOP consultant and publisher of the California Target Book, a nonpartisan guide to state politics.

"If Janice Hahn wins, it could be a good seat for her to keep," Hoffenblum said. "It might not be a totally safe Democratic seat, but I think it could be tough for a Republican to win in a district like that."

Next door, Waters could be fighting for political survival if the proposed eastward shift of her district is ultimately approved.

The area's growing Latino population could make it difficult for her to hold on to a historically black district.

Waters could not be reached for comment.

Feng said politicians finding themselves in new areas should make an effort to reach out to their new constituents.

"The reality is that California's demographics are changing, so if an elected official wants to represent an area, then they need to be responsive to that changing constituency," Feng said. "Nobody should feel they have a birthright to having a district drawn a certain way."

For months, political experts had agreed that the Palos Verdes Peninsula would be the most impacted region of the South Bay in the redistricting process.

The proposed maps harken back to the 1990s, when The Hill was lumped together with its coastal neighbors for state and federal representation, said longtime Rancho Palos Verdes City Councilman Doug Stern.

"It's a much better fit in terms of a logical structure," Stern said. "This will mean better representation at every level and the districts will not be based on giving someone a political edge."

The statewide shake-up will also realign several Assembly districts in the South Bay.

The Assembly seat held by Democrat Bonnie Lowenthal would remain in Long Beach and no longer jut into the Harbor Area and the Palos Verdes Peninsula, according to the revised maps.

Instead, the Palos Verdes Peninsula would be included in a district that runs north to Westchester and Playa del Rey, currently represented by Assemblywoman Betsy Butler.

Under the revised map, Butler's home in Marina del Rey could be split from the district and placed into an area that includes Malibu, Santa Monica, West Hollywood and Beverly Hills.

Butler, who was elected last November, declined to say whether she would move.

"I'm not exactly house hunting yet because these are still draft maps until August, so we'll have to see what happens after that," Butler said. "The maps have been changing a little bit every day, so I think it's all still very fluid."

The proposed map also squeezes Assemblymen Steve Bradford and Warren Furutani into the same district, which would encompass Inglewood, Hawthorne, Gardena and Harbor City.

Furutani's chief of staff, Sandra Sanchez, did not return two phone calls seeking comment.

Bradford said he is not pleased with the redistricting proposal and suggested that districts across California remain unchanged.

"I have not yet spoken with Assembly member Furutani, but it is not our desire to run against each other," Bradford said. "These lines just force incumbents to run against each other. Changing the lines would not make the races more competitive in a state where Democrats hold the majority."

Bradford said increased competition would more likely come from the state's new open primary system, which allows the top two vote-getters to advance to a runoff, even if they are in the same party.

The South Bay will retain two state Senate seats, but the demographics of each would dramatically change.

The state Senate district currently held by Lieu would reach as far north as Beverly Hills and West Hollywood, move through Santa Monica and hug the coast down to the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

The neighboring state Senate district held by Wright would stretch from Inglewood and Hawthorne down to the Port of Los Angeles.

"These are draft maps and the outcome won't affect me for another 3 1/2 years," Lieu said. "But I do encourage people to get involved in the process and submit their public comments."

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Want to go?

What: California Citizens Redistricting Commission Public Input Hearing.

When: 6 p.m. June 16.

Where: Culver City council chambers, City Hall, 9770 Culver Blvd.