



Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission

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REDISTRICTING NEWS

October 31, 2001

The Commission's schedule has been postponed recently, but the Commission is now ready to begin its public hearings. We welcome our new Commissioner on board. Senator Fred Thomas appointed Gregory D. Barkus on October 11, 2001, to the position formerly held by Elaine Sliter. Former Commissioner Sliter resigned from the Commission on September 7, 2001, to take Representative Paul Sliter's place in the House of Representatives after his unexpected death. Commissioner Barkus will represent the region of Lincoln, Flathead, Sanders, Lake, Mineral, Missoula, and Ravalli Counties. Commissioner Barkus lives in Kalispell and is a Senior Vice President for D.A. Davidson. He attended Havre public schools and graduated from the University of Montana at Missoula.

The Old Person v. Cooney (Brown) Voting Rights Act lawsuit is on remand from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and the trial begins November 5, 2001, in Helena. If the plaintiffs prevail and the court finds vote dilution in the plan adopted by the 1990 Commission, the plaintiffs seek a remedy for the 2002 election. At this time, the 2000 Commission is not a party to the trial, and it is unknown what the effect of a decision or a potential remedy may be on the 2000 Commission.

Now that the Commission is back to a full complement and staff is up and running on the new computer system, the Commission's public hearing schedule begins in November. The first region that the Commissioners will address is the Northcentral Region of Glacier, Pondera, Teton, Toole, Liberty, Chouteau, Cascade, Hill, Blaine, Judith Basin, Fergus, and Petroleum Counties. Some of the districts may involve adjacent counties, and those districts will be addressed when the Commission visits those respective regions.

The Commission will hold its first public hearing in Great Falls on Tuesday, November 13, 2001. The Commission will hold an executive session at 3 p.m. at the Energy West Hospitality Room. This session is open to the public, but the Commission will not be accepting public testimony because it will be welcoming its new member and receiving a briefing on the plans. The public hearing will be at 7:00 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at the Civic Center, Room 206 (use southeast entrance).

A mailing of maps and district descriptions was sent to the Clerk and Recorders, Tribal representatives, Central Committee Chairs, Legislators, and others in the Northcentral Region. Please check the Commission's website for more information. There is a "Redistricting" link on the Legislative Branch website at leg.mt.gov.

Staff has completed information-gathering visits to the Northeast Region and has begun the visits to the Southeast Region. The Commission will hold public hearings at Havre and in the Northeast Region in January and decide on a hearing schedule for February and March for the Southeast Region. From there the Commission will head west through Southcentral Montana, complete Central and Southwest Montana before heading for Western Montana by next spring.

For more information, contact Susan Byorth Fox, (406) 444-3064 or sfox@mt.gov.

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