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**Capitol View
Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

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**Redistricting Exercise Sure to Cause the Usual Commotion**

Somebody’s ox is about to get gored.

Lawmakers are engaged in the decennial drawing of new maps for legislative and congressional representation as well as the less contentious boundaries for the Nebraska Supreme Court, Public Service Commission, University of Nebraska Board of Regents and the Nebraska State Board of Education.

It is the epitome of urban vs rural, Republican vs Democrat. In Nebraska, most Democrats are in the urban areas and most of the farm population votes Republican. Three Nebraska counties – Douglas, Lancaster and Sarpy – accounted for 56 percent of the population in the recently completed census. Those three are also clustered in extreme eastern Nebraska and include the cities of Bellevue, Lincoln and Omaha.

It comes as no surprise, with 32 Republicans and 17 Democrats in the officially nonpartisan Unicameral, that the Republicans are in charge during this special session. Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn chairs the special redistricting committee of five Republicans and four Democrats. Their work – done mostly behind closed doors this time – will be debated by the full Legislature during the two-week special session.

“They bring a map; we bring a map,” said the Republican Linehan who also chairs the Revenue Committee. She said she also keeps the governor informed. This year the maps are being discussed in executive sessions of the committee to decrease the influence of one side or the other as often happened during public hearings.

On its face, the census figures indicate that Greater Nebraska (everything west of Ninth Street on downtown Lincoln’s western edge) should lose two seats to the three largest counties. Legislative districts are created to include an equal number of constituents in each. Dividing the pie 49 ways can get messy.

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A bigger issue is the Congressional Districts where the battle seems to be for the mostly Omaha-area 2nd Congressional seat now held by Republican Representative Don Bacon. Republicans would like to strengthen their numbers there since the state awards three of its five electoral votes to the winner in each congressional district, while assigning the other two electoral votes to the statewide victor.

Republicans have won 13 of the last 14 House contests in the 2nd Congressional District, thanks most recently to Sarpy County precincts, but they lost two of the last four presidential electoral votes in the district and they want to bring an end to that.

Census figures suggest that Lincoln-Lancaster County is entitled to 8 state senators, one more than they currently have, but that’ll be an uphill battle as rural interests fight to limit the urban addition to one and metropolitan Omaha lays claim to an additional senator or two.

The redistricting task has once again fallen on the Legislature since the Covid-19 pandemic forced the scrapping of a petition drive to get a proposed constitutional amendment on the ballot that would create a nine-member citizens commission to recommend new district maps to the Legislature for approval.

Lawmakers were forced into a special session since the pandemic also delayed federal census figures.

Speaker of the Legislature Sen. Mike Hilgers of Lincoln asked his colleagues to limit their work to two weeks. That forced the committee into action several weeks before the session was gaveled in.

They started with the “easy” maps for the other governmental entities and are saving the big show for the legislative and congressional showdown. Results of past redistricting efforts have wound up in court and more special sessions.

Let’s hope that an acceptable balance can be reached quickly this time around.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years.*