



June 18, 2012

Summer Legislative Update II: **Incumbents and Redistricting for Fall, 2012, State Elections**

- *Redistricting Significantly Changes State Legislative and U.S. Congressional District Boundaries.*
- *21 Assembly and 3 Senate Members Will Retire or Seek Higher Office.*
- *An Additional 16 Assembly Incumbents Will Run in New Districts Because of Redistricting.*
- *New Resource Document Linked [Here](#) Lists the Status of All State Assembly and Senate Incumbents.*

State legislative and U.S. Congressional district boundaries are redrawn following each decennial U.S. Census creating districts in effect for the following decade. The redistricting process accounts for shifting populations nationally. Wisconsin retained its 8 U.S. House seats (of 435 nationally) following the 2010 Census. Based on our relative population, the state had 9 House seats until 2003 and 10 for a period between the 1930's until 1973. Redistricting also accounts for shifting populations – and politics – internally across the state's 99 Assembly and 33 Senate districts.

Wisconsin 2011 Acts 43 and 44 establish new state and U.S. House districts for Wisconsin in effect from Fall, 2012, through 2022. Like many states, Wisconsin's new districts are created by the legislative majority and are passed and signed as state law. This was the first time since 1952 that one party controlled both houses of the Legislature and the Governor's office for redistricting.

Redistricting laws, or the process used in crafting them, are subject to legal review and often end up in court. The most recent process was challenged and resulted in a court ordering the redrawing boundaries in two heavily Hispanic Milwaukee-area Assembly districts. The remaining 97 Assembly districts, all 33 Senate districts, and Wisconsin's 8 U.S. House districts were upheld as constitutional. Legal challenges questioning the movement of 300,000 voters statewide into new districts failed.

Over time, redistricting – in Wisconsin and across many states – has created new districts that lean more toward one party, that move existing districts out from under incumbents, or that collect together politically homogeneous areas as more "safe" Republican and Democrat seats. Most modern court decisions nationally over time have tended to reinforce that partisan officials have broad authority to pick their own constituents in redistricting. Some states have moved to independent or bipartisan

redistricting commissions. Wisconsin remains in the firm majority of states (at least 34) in which the Legislature conducts the process (or approves the final results).

Every legislative term includes member attrition and at least 21 Assembly members and 3 Senators have left or will leave their current office to retire from elected service or to seek a higher elected office. Among 21 departing Assembly members, 13 are retiring (7 Democrats, 5 Republicans and 1 Independent). The remaining 8 are running for new offices. Five are Democrats (2 are running for U.S. Congress, 1 is running for state Senate, 1 just lost a bid to fill an open state Senate seat, and 1 is running back home for district attorney). Three are Republicans (1 is running for U.S. Senate, 1 for state Senate, and 1 just won an open state Senate seat). Among the 2 state Senators leaving, one Democrat will retire and one Republican resigned in the face of a recall challenge.

A less well-known, but equally profound, story this term is that another 16 members of the Assembly – 1 of every 6 members of the body – are running to stay in the Assembly but in new districts. These 10 Democrats and 6 Republicans are incumbents in one Assembly district who must run in a new district that includes their home.

A new resource document is linked [HERE](#) listing the status of each current state Assembly and Senate incumbent based on his/her announced plans, recent recall elections, and significantly changed new district boundaries due to redistricting. A new guide to state Legislative and Congressional districts by technical college district is in development and will be shared with you in July.

This report was prepared by Paul Gabriel, Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association. Any analysis or opinion is exclusively the author's.