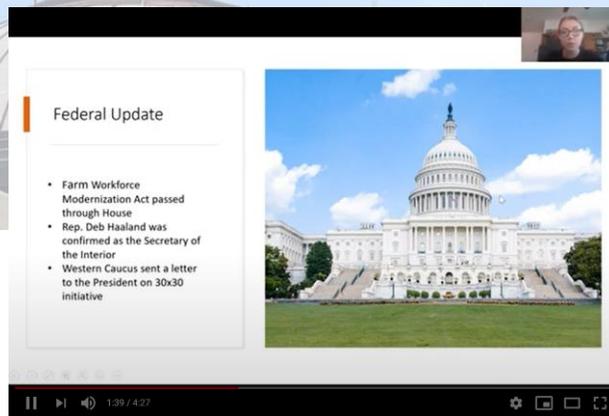


While You Were Working

A PUBLICATION OF THE ARIZONA FARM BUREAU GOVERNMENT RELATIONS TEAM

Click here to watch a short video update from your GR Team! (Video will open in a new screen.)



Delay, Delay, Delay: Redistricting Process Waiting on Data

Chelsea McGuire, Government Relations Director

Aside from the election's normal importance, you might remember that one of the reasons we worked so hard to drive our members to the polls in 2020 was the Independent Redistricting Commission, or IRC. Now, that commission has been selected and is beginning its work in earnest – or at least as earnest as possible, given some unique circumstances.

Remind me: what's the IRC again?

The IRC is a bipartisan group of individuals appointed every ten years to draw new legislative and congressional district maps for the state. Made up of two Republicans, two Democrats, and one Independent chairperson, this group attempts to uphold the “one person, one vote” mission by drawing political districts that contain roughly the same number of people per district.

The reason this group meets every 10 years is because the US Census also takes place every ten years. New maps are based on updated census data showing how many people live in our state and where they are located. And

while it's always interesting to see how Arizona's demographics have shifted in the past decade, this year brings with it a new layer of excitement: the near certainty that Arizona will gain an additional Congressional district, increasing our number of congressmen from nine to ten.

So how much progress have we made so far in the process of drawing the next decade's maps?

We have a full commission and an Executive Director.

Arizona's process for drawing these maps is unique. It was voter-created in 2000 to try and limit the influence of the Legislature (and other political forces) in redrawing the State's political boundaries. Of the five people on the commission, four are appointed by legislative leadership – namely, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and minority leaders in both chambers. The fifth member, who also [serves as the chair](#), must be independent of any political party (i.e., not registered with any party). And by January 21,

Curveball (cont'd)

all five commissioners had been selected to serve.

And on Tuesday, March 16, a key staff member was chosen by a 3-2 vote of the commissioners. Brian Schmitt, who was the chief of staff for a Phoenix City Councilman, was selected as the commission's Executive Director from a field of more than 40 candidates who had applied for the position. Schmitt also worked on John McCain's presidential campaign and spent some time volunteering for then-Senator McSally.

Soon, we will have legal and mapping consultants.

Now that the Executive Director has been selected, the next step will be to hire a mapping consultant and a legal consultant. Veterans of this process will remember that [these hires caused significant turmoil](#) on the IRC the last time around, so how the pool of candidates for those positions is determined may be key in keeping the peace this time around.

But we still don't have Census data.

No matter how capable the staff or how ready the commissioners, it won't be possible for the IRC to get much done without numbers. And unfortunately, Census data is still not available. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the US Census Bureau to suspend normal operations for a significant period of time, so already, the data was delayed. Then-President Trump also issued a directive regarding whether those who are in the United States illegally could be included in the count – a directive which was later rescinded by current-President Biden, which has caused the need for additional time to fix data irregularities. So with all of that, the numbers that should have been available in early 2021 are now [delayed until late September](#).

In addition to leaving us all in suspense as to where our new lines will be drawn, this delay has also thrown a curve ball at the next class of hopeful elected officials – how can you start collecting signatures to get your name on the ballot if you don't even know what district you live in? To try and alleviate that problem, Senator JD Mesnard proposed a bill that would allow candidates to start gathering signatures based on current district boundaries, irrespective of how the maps might change. The measure has broad bipartisan support and is slated for a vote in the House in a matter of days.

The Bottom Line

Redistricting is relevant to every Arizonan, but it is especially impactful on rural Arizona. As the commissioners work to create districts that have a specific amount of people in them, the smaller populations of rural Arizona are sometimes swept up and overshadowed by large metropolitan areas. Where these lines are drawn can make the difference between a rural candidate's ability to get elected or not, and between rural priorities remaining at the forefront or being drowned out by urban and commercial voices. As the IRC continues to put together as many pieces of the redistricting puzzle as it can, we will continue to closely monitor its activities and report back to you with all you need to know.