

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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Contra Costa Times editorial: East Bay supervisor boundaries must be logical and fair

Contra Costa Times editorial
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THIS IS the year for redistricting. Following the results of the U.S. Census every 10 years, political boundaries are redrawn to adjust for population shifts and ensure that elected representatives have roughly equal numbers of constituents.

Thanks to voter-approved ballot initiatives, the boundaries for California's congressional and legislative district will be drawn this year by an independent commission. The change takes the task out of the hands of legislators, who have usually shown more interest in protecting their careers than creating rational boundaries.

But the new process does not affect local governments -- like county supervisors, transit agencies, water boards, park districts and some city councils -- that divide up their representation by geographical districts. There, the redistricting task still falls to the current elected officials.

They have a choice: They can cooperate for the benefit of constituents, or they can try to squeeze out electoral advantages and punish their political opponents. We hope elected officials of the East Bay will behave maturely, creating districts that are geographically logical and preserve communities of interest. While we anticipate those officials are unlikely to draw districts that force them to move to run for re-election, we will condemn attempts to draw meandering lines designed purely to preserve electoral advantages.

In her previews last

week of the upcoming redistricting issues for the Alameda County and Contra Costa boards of supervisors, political writer Lisa Vorderbrueggen highlighted the challenges of redrawing political

boundaries. The overriding principle of equal representation is actually pretty simple: Take the total population of each county and divide it by five, the number of supervisorial districts. That's how many people should be in each district. Districts with fewer people must expand; while those above the average population must be shrunk.

In Alameda County, the supervisors will begin with a reasonable district map from the last decade. We expect some simple tweaking of the lines should easily adjust for the rapid growth over the past 10 years in Supervisor Scott Haggerty's district, which stretches from Fremont to Livermore. His district must be trimmed the most, while the Oakland-Alameda-San Leandro district of Wilma Chan must be expanded the most because it currently has the fewest number of residents.

Contra Costa presents a completely different situation. First, the population shifts of the past decade are greater. Second, the county starts with a badly drawn map from 10 years ago.

In 2001, a majority of the county Board of Supervisors, led by then-Supervisor, now-state Senator, Mark DeSaulnier, in a process driven by political ambition, personality conflicts and battles over county growth, punished a supervisor out of favor by creating an abominable district that stretches from the San Ramon Valley to Discovery Bay.

The district, now represented by Supervisor Mary Piepho of Discovery Bay, takes at least an hour to traverse, requiring her to circumnavigate Mount

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Diablo. It makes no sense and must be fixed.

Fortunately, it's easily corrected. Mapmakers should have no problems drawing a district for her that is contained in eastern Contra Costa, from Antioch to the San Joaquin County line. Indeed, if supervisors behave responsibly, they can easily adjust the map to come up with a rational plan that eliminates long travel distances for any of the districts.

Unfortunately, Piepho wants to incorporate all of Walnut Creek into her district. It makes no sense to stretch a district from Discovery Bay to Walnut Creek when there is enough population at her end of the county to populate a district.

Let's hope those sorts of plans die quick and quiet deaths. Districts in both counties should be drawn with logic and fairness as the foremost considerations and, to the extent possible, they should eschew political considerations.

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