

Supreme Court Authorizes Redistricting Boundaries for 2012 Elections

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Washington Supreme Court on Wednesday authorized use of the new Redistricting Commission boundaries to run the 2012 elections, even as a citizen challenge to the commission's work continues to proceed. Secretary of State Sam Reed said he was pleased -- and relieved -- to get the ruling. This is very good news, our 2012 elections season is barreling down on us, with Filing Week beginning May 14 and Top 2 Primary ballots going in the mail in July. The counties are working very hard to meet the deadlines for redistricting voting precincts and redrawing a number of boundaries to comply with population shifts and the work of the Commission. - Secretary of State Sam Reed

State Elections Co-Director Shane Hamlin was delighted with the court's ruling. "This provides us stable ground and certainty for the administration of the 2012 elections. It was very important for election officials to know which boundaries and precincts they can use. That is basic, foundational information. The counties are definitely under the gun to get all of the boundary changes ready." The citizen commission, comprised of two Democrats and two Republicans and a non-voting chairwoman, spent 2011 redrawing the 49 legislative districts and 10 congressional districts, using fresh Census data. The Legislature made minor modifications and the plan went into effect on Feb. 7. John Milem, Vancouver, a longtime student of the redistricting process, filed his challenge on Feb. 8. The Attorney General's Office filed the urgent request to the Supreme Court shortly after Milem filed his challenge. Chief Justice Barbara Madsen, writing Wednesday for a unanimous court, noted that Filing Week is now only two months away and that by the end of next month, counties must establish voting precincts that align with new district boundaries. Madsen said "...In view of the approaching deadlines for the 2012 elections and the need for adequate time to perfect the case and consider briefs and arguments of the parties on the merits of Mr. Milem's petition, the court unanimously agreed" that the Commission plan will govern this year's elections. Milem and state attorneys were given until April 13 to submit an agreed finding of facts. If that agreement isn't possible, the case will be sent down to the Thurston County Superior Court for fact-finding, with a report due back to the high court by May 29. The date for the high court's oral arguments will be set "in due course," Madsen wrote.