Redistricting Board Hopes Map Redrawing is Done

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Alexandra Gutierrez/APRN

In a half-hour meeting on a Sunday afternoon, the Alaska Redistricting Board unanimously agreed on a new electoral map. The process of drawing the state's political boundaries has been going on for nearly three years. Along the way, board members described it as a "struggle," Democrats characterized it as gerrymandering by a Republican-dominated group, and the courts deemed it unconstitutional.

Board member Bob Brodie of Kodiak expressed relief at the idea that Sunday's meeting could be the board's last.

"It wasn't an easy job in the beginning, and it wasn't any easier later.”

The new plan is partially based on a proposal from the Bethel-based Native Corporation Calista, and there are some major changes from the temporary map used in the 2012 election. It gets rid of a controversial district that mixed some Fairbanks area residents with rural Alaska; it removes Petersburg from Juneau's Senate district; and it reconnects the Aleutian chain.

All of those issues had been raised as constitutional problems in ongoing litigation, and board attorney Michael White said at the meeting that the new map addresses those legal claims.

The map also opens up a Senate seat in the Mat-Su area by placing Eagle River Republicans Anna Fairclough and Fred Dyson in the same district, and it creates a new House seat in the Interior by putting North Pole Republicans Doug Isaacson and Tammie Wilson in the same political boundaries.

During Sunday's meeting, board members discussed the challenges of complying with both the Alaska Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act. The act, which is meant to protect the influence of minority populations, was partially struck down by the Supreme Court last month.

Board member Jim Holm was critical of giving what he called “special treatment” to Alaska Native voters.

"I find it to be disconcerting that we so many times try to allow people to have extra voting rights versus people who are just plain Alaskans. I've been here 67 years, and I'm an Alaskan. I may not be an Alaska Native, but I'm a native Alaskan."

The map will now be reviewed by the courts to determine whether it complies with state law.