

Senate moves Ridley's district to Lexington

By Frank Boyett

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A redistricting bill passed Wednesday by the state Senate orphaned Sen. Dorsey Ridley in a piece of what he termed "political hardball."

The Senate approved a Republican plan that moves Ridley's 4th Senate District about 200 miles east to the Lexington vicinity.

"I have gone from being one of the most rural senators in the state of Kentucky ... to downtown Lexington, including Rupp Arena," he said.

But that's just Ridley's predicament. Geographically, Henderson and Webster counties will be lumped with McLean and Hopkins counties in the 6th Senate District, which is currently represented by Sen. Jerry Rhoads, D-Madisonville. Union County, currently part of Ridley's territory, will become part of the 3rd Senate District represented by Sen. Joey Pendleton, D-Hopkinsville.

Ridley said he was notified of the impending change a little more than three hours before the Senate approved it 22-14, largely along party lines.

"There wasn't a lot of time to digest it or understand it," he said. "Any time you deal with redistricting, you've got the most political hardball played. This is not the first time this type of thing has occurred."

The Senate's redistricting plan differs from that approved by the House of Representatives, but generally the two houses take a hands-off approach to the other's district boundaries. "It goes to a conference committee, but I doubt there will be much change, if any," Ridley said.

Both Ridley and Rhoads are up for re-election in 2014. If given final approval, that means Rhoads would represent this area the next two years, while Ridley would technically represent downtown Lexington. "

"It's all about political gain," he said. "They have done the most politically charged change they could. Their attempt is to take me out of the Kentucky State Senate. But that is still to be determined."

He noted that he was a state representative from Webster County in the 1980s, and still has friends and family in that vicinity as well as in McLean and Hopkins counties. So he's not writing off challenging Rhoads, although the two have always been on

good terms in the past. Ridley's sister has long been married to Rhoads' brother. "What that makes us is good friends," Ridley said. "The decision on if I run again for the state Senate will certainly be made at a later date."

The state Senate's redistricting plan shifts Democratic firebrand Sen. Kathy Stein's district out of Lexington into a largely rural territory that includes the cities of Maysville and Vanceburg. Stein, an attorney, described the Senate proposal as petty and politically motivated.

"It's certainly taken me by surprise, but I'm trying to look at it calmly, as an attorney would, and determine what my options are," Stein said.

Senate Republicans explained that approving the plan was necessary to adjust to the changing population across the state.

"Unfortunately, with the population shifts and changes, it required putting some incumbents in the same districts," said Sen. Damon Thayer, R-Georgetown, chairman of the Senate State and Local Government Committee, which approved the plan before sending it on to the Senate. "That is certainly not ideal, but unfortunately that is the decision we had to make in order to make sure we had a constitutional and legal map."

Always hotly debated, legislative and congressional redistricting occurs every 10 years to account for population changes reported in the U.S. Census. The latest count found that the state's overall population grew from 4 million to 4.3 million from 2000 to 2010. Populations of rural areas in eastern and western Kentucky declined sharply while urban centers grew.

Lawmakers have worked for months to develop plans that they believe would provide equal representation at the state and federal level.



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