



'Highly partisan' congressional maps proffered by House Redistricting Committee

By SUZANNE ROOK & HPIS STAFF
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Congressional and legislative maps, redrawn using data from the 2020 Census, could bring changes to area voters, particularly when it comes to who's on the ballot next November.

The maps, proposed by the Minnesota House Redistricting Committee, would move all of Rice and Goodhue counties into the 1st Congressional District now represented by conservative Republican Jim Hagedorn. The southern portion of both Scott and Dakota counties would also move to CD1. The 2nd Congressional District, represented by DFLer Angie Craig, would shift to the northeast and farther into Washington County.



Murphy

State legislative maps, also presented to the Committee last week, keep Rice County divided into two legislative districts, but instead of the more southerly district now represented by John Jasinski including a healthy chunk of Steele County and the northeastern portion of Waseca County, it would include portions of five counties.



Torkelson

In the new Senate District 62 would be all of Waseca County and only Deerfield and Medford townships in Steele, nearly all of Le Sueur County, Rice County townships Erin, Shieldsville, Morristown, Warsaw, Walcott, Richland, Wells and Cannon City, three northeast Blue Earth County townships and Blakely Township in the far southwest corner of Scott County.

As drawn, the maps appear to put both Jasinski and Sen. Rich Draheim, R-Madison Lake, who now represents Senate District 20, in the proposed District 62. Though only some of Lakeville is included in the new Senate District 57, the map appears to show Sen. Zach Duckworth's remaining in the newly numbered district.

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VACCINE



Ron Neubauer and Blake Arett work the laser table at Climate by Design International (CDI) in Owatonna, where facilities have been outfitted to increase air circulation and filtration to reduce the spread of COVID-19. CEO Tom Peterson said these proactive measures and vaccination education will keep CDI safe and help them be prepared if a vaccine mandate is pushed through to large employers. (Julian Hast/southernmnn.com)

VAX OR MASK?

Large employers prep as vaccine mandate remains held up in court

By JULIAN HAST
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Legal wrangling has put the COVID-19 vaccine requirements for large employers on hold for an unknown amount of time, but many Owatonna employers are preparing anyway.

The specific mandate, announced by the White House on Nov. 4, is a vaccination requirement issued to employers of 100 or more employees by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the regulatory agency of the United States Department of Labor. The requirement, which would give the unvaccinated workers of large employers the option of being vaccinated by

Jan. 4 or wearing a mask and undergoing weekly COVID-19 testing if they choose not to vaccinate, was temporarily "stayed" — or put on hold — in mid-November, after district courts struck down the order.

The mandate would also require employers to pay employees for the time it takes them to get vaccinated, and to provide sick leave for employees recovering from side effects.

Preparing for the mandate

Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism President Brad Meier said many local businesses are putting policies in place so that if and when the mandate goes into effect, they're

ready. He added that the longer the "stay" on the mandate goes on, the more likely it is for the original Jan. 4 date to be changed to a later date.

Aside from health care organizations like Allina Health and AdaptHealth Minnesota in Owatonna, few companies are planning to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for all employees.

According to Julie Rethemeier, vice president and director of public affairs and advertising at Federated Insurance in Owatonna, Federated does not plan to mandate that all employees get vaccinated.

See MANDATE on 3A



The "mega-tree" is one of 80 different displays that are able to be seen at the Havana Lights display, a holiday drive-thru experience aiming to raise funds to help care for Steele County's furry friends. (Photo courtesy of Kathy Knutson)

Havana Lights returns to continue raising funds for a 'pawsitive' cause

By EMILY KAHNKE
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For many years, Kathy and Duane Knutson enjoyed getting into the Christmas spirit by adorning their yard with elaborate Christmas light displays.

Kathy Knutson said she started doing the elaborate displays for her mother, who always enjoyed looking at the lights. Knutson herself recalled as a child driving around and admiring people's displays.

Following the death of her mother, Knutson put a lone angel in her yard in memory of her. Soon, people were coming up to her and asking why she didn't put up all of her lights that year.

"I didn't realize how important it was to the community and how much enjoyment they got out of it," Knutson said. "So it was after that that I decided to keep the big displays going for families to enjoy and make memories together."

A handful of years ago, the Knutson's decided to partner with the nonprofit organization Helping Paws of Southern MN. Knutson is a board member for the

IF YOU GO

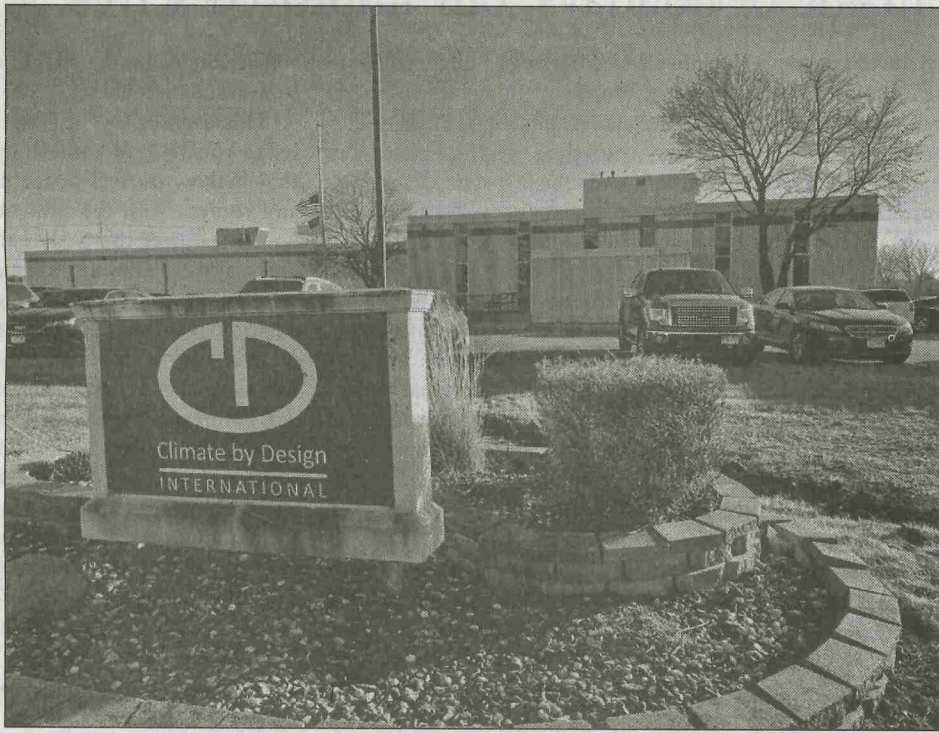
Where: 2048 Havana Rd. Owatonna
When: Every night from dusk to 10 p.m. until January 3rd
Free-will donations are welcome, but not required and can be left in the bins provided at the entrance of the display.

organization and long-time volunteer. Together with her husband, they decided to allow the public to drive through their yard to admire the twinkling lights — an event now affectionately named "Havana Lights." The couple also started taking free-will donations of cash, cat food, dog food, litter and any other pet product to donate to Helping Paws.

So far in 2021, Helping Paws has been able to help more than 200 cats through their Trap-Neuter-Return approach, but their work isn't done.

See LIGHTS on 3A

LOCAL



Climate by Design International (CDI), a manufacturer in Owatonna, aims to increase data capability to keep track of weekly testing for unvaccinated workers, as well as find a testing partner to help lower the cost of weekly COVID-19 tests for the unvaccinated, should the mandate of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) go through. (Julian Hast/southernminn.com)

MANDATE

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"We have chosen vaccine education and a \$1,000 vaccination incentive as the best approach for our organization," Rethemeier said. "If the OSHA ETS [emergency temporary standard] is upheld in courts we will comply with testing and masking requirements."

Asked what the vaccine education consists of and if the \$1,000 incentive will be awarded retroactively to employees vaccinated before the incentive was put into place, Rethemeier declined to comment. She also declined to comment on whether or not Federated will bear the cost of testing employees for COVID-19 every week, or if they will require workers to pay for it.

Tom Peterson, CEO and founder of Climate by Design International (CDI) in Owatonna, a manufacturer with 150 employees, described a similar approach of encouragement without coercion at CDI's three Owatonna facilities. Though CDI doesn't offer incentives for unvaccinated employees who choose to vaccinate — Peterson cited concerns of unfairness to already-vaccinated workers who would be excluded from them — it invited Sterling Pharmacy into its facilities for half a day to give flu and COVID shots to workers that wanted them, in hopes of making the process as

OSHA ETS STATEMENT

To read the statement issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on its emergency temporary standard (ETS), visit [osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4162.pdf](https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4162.pdf).

convenient as possible. It also continues to highly recommend masks and follow current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and OSHA guidelines on COVID-19, in addition to investing in enhanced air filtration and increasing the amount of outside air in its facility.

As far as preparing for the OSHA mandate, Peterson said CDI is focused on trying to develop data capabilities to keep track of the weekly testing of unvaccinated employees, as well as finding a COVID-19 testing company to partner with to bring down the cost of the tests.

"The mandate as it is written allows the company to not pay for the testing, but the testing is so expensive that if you were to ask an employee to do that, they would be taking a very substantial pay cut just to pay for the testing," Peterson said. "So in our minds, that's unrealistic to have the employee pay for that testing, so we would have to take that on as a company."



Meier

Meier guessed most companies would probably pay for the tests themselves if the mandate went through, so as to not alienate their existing and prospective employees in both an already competitive employment market and a workforce shortage. The same logic would apply to any companies thinking about mandating vaccines for their workers.

"Everybody's in a workforce shortage right now, so it just creates one more piece of the puzzle for employers that are gonna fall under that mandate," Meier said.

Beyond logistics and the potential cost burden of weekly tests, Peterson said he was concerned that if the mandate went into effect, it would set opposing ideological camps against one another even more fiercely than they've already been.

"There's passionate people on each side of the equation," he said. "I'm concerned for our company, I'm concerned for our city, I'm concerned for our nation and how much fuel this adds to the fire of division."

Reach Reporter Julian Hast at 507-333-3133. © Copyright 2021 APG Media of Southern Minnesota. All rights reserved.

MAPS

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The northern part of Rice County would be placed in Senate District 57. The proposed district is fairly compact and includes 19 townships and a piece of one other in Rice, Dakota and Scott counties. In Rice County, Wheatland, Webster, Forest, Bridgewater, Northfield and Wheeling would be combined with Greenvale, Waterford, Sciota, Randolph, Eureka, Castle Rock, Hampton, Vermillion and townships along the southern Scott County line.

The maps, as proposed ensure, the area's state representatives aren't placed in a district with another incumbent.

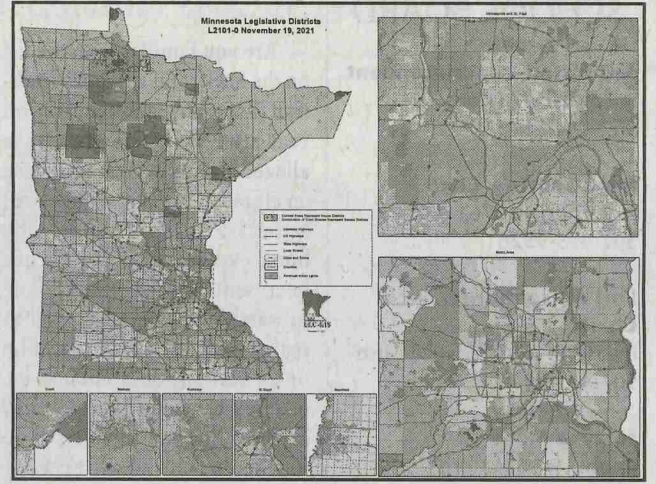
But these maps are far from final.

While Rep. Mary Murphy, DFL-Hermantown, the committee chair, said both redistricting proposals meet the committee's constitutional and legislative responsibilities, the lead Republican on the panel, Rep. Paul Torkelson, R-Hanska, called them "highly partisan" and said they'd been drawn without input from his party.

"I do have to make it very clear to anyone who is listening that there was no Republican participation in this map or in the map that was presented last week," Torkelson said, adding that neither proposal is a step toward achieving an agreement that can become law.

Murphy acknowledged the proposals are not perfect, but are meant to start the conversation.

"I truly believe we could pass



a bill out of the Legislature ... by working together," she said.

Public testimony on the proposals is scheduled to be taken late next week.

The nonpartisan House Research Department summary of the congressional redistricting proposal outlines several guiding principles. They include:

- each district will have an "ideal" population of 713,312;
- each district is to be compact and contiguous;
- the principle of "nesting" used in state legislative districts isn't used for congressional districts;
- congressional district numbers begin in the southeast corner of the state and end in the northeast corner;
- attention is given to the impact on racial and language minority communities in the districts' design;
- division of federally recognized American Indian reservations is only possible in limited circumstances; and
- division of counties, cities, school districts and towns must

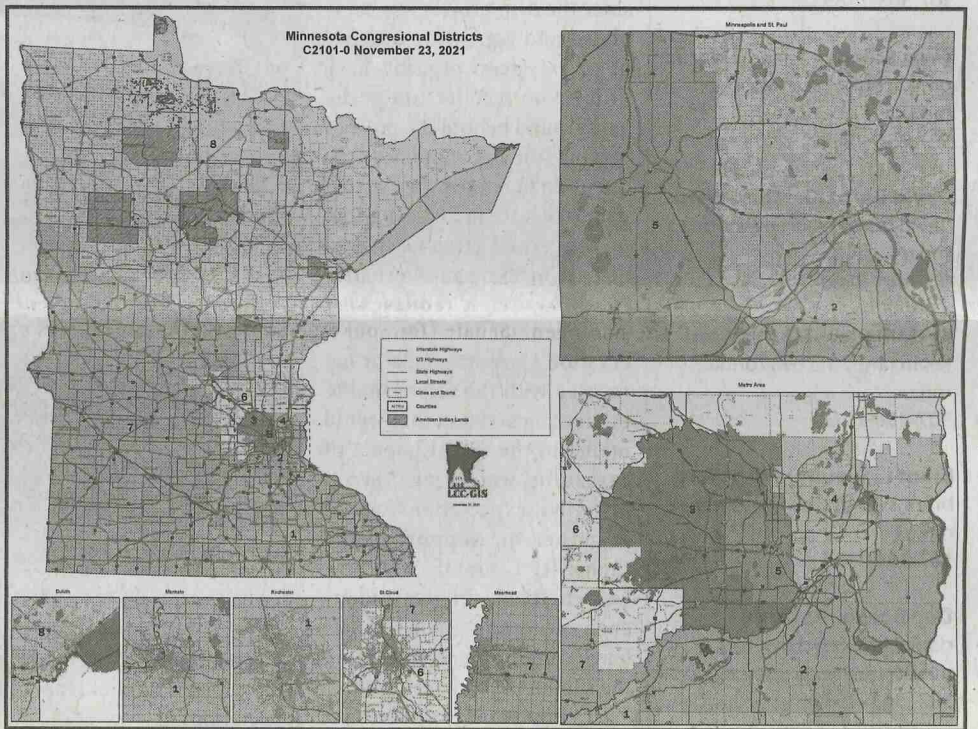
be minimized.

The new maps are required by the Minnesota Constitution in the wake of the 2020 Census, which is used to detail each state's population growth and shifts over the past decade, and update boundaries so each district has roughly the same number of people and is therefore represented equally.

Districts where population was lost or grew more slowly are expanded geographically while boundaries of faster growing districts shrink. But how those changes are made can have political consequences, which has proven to be an obstacle lawmakers could not overcome when this process has taken place over the last several decades.

Because the Legislature has been unable to reach an agreement on the final maps, the state's courts have had to step in to determine the new districts and are preparing to do so again.

Officials say the redistricting process must be completed by Feb. 15, 2022 so that next year's election cycle can proceed on schedule.



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