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**New maps make for tough incumbent decisions**

*By WisPolitics.com*

After more than 11 years in the Wisconsin State Legislature, Republican Sen. Dale Kooyenga isn’t about to move his family just for a chance to stick around.

But after nearly just eight months in the building, it was a tougher call for GOP Rep. William Penterman.

The former legislative aide won a south-central Wisconsin seat in a July special election to a district that Donald Trump won by more than 10 points in the fall 2020 election.

Under Gov. Tony Evers’ maps christened by the state Supreme Court, his 37th Assembly District has moved to a plus-27 percent Democratic seat that stretches from his home base in Columbus to Sun Prairie and even the area around the Madison airport.

Initially undecided on whether to stay in the 37th or move to the 28th, Penterman made the call that he’s moving, accusing Evers of trying to “redistrict me out of the heart of my district.”

The U.S. Supreme Court looks to have the last word on whether Evers’ maps are in place for the 2022 elections. But unless GOP lawmakers are successful in their appeals to the nation’s highest court, the landscape for the Assembly and Senate maps are a lot different from what Republicans put in place 11 years ago.

In the Senate, Republicans tried to shore up Kooyenga’s suburban Milwaukee seat by making it a swing district after Joe Biden won it by 8.5 points in 2020. But with the map now in place, not only does he live in the 8th Senate District but the 5th Senate District also is slightly more Democratic. Dave’s Redistricting, a tool used by those who follow redistricting, rates the new district’s performance as plus 9.8% in the Democrats’ favor.

The 5th Senate District is the Democrats’ best pickup opportunity of the Senate seats in play this fall. It adds areas of Milwaukee that had been in the heavily Democratic 4th and 6th districts while shedding GOP-friendly territory in the city’s suburbs. Republicans are in a holding pattern in looking for possible replacements until the U.S. Supreme Court

weighs in.

Democrats also could have a shot at three other seats but will have to defend two in what could be a difficult environment.

**Senate**

Here’s a list of the most competitive Senate seats under the new maps. Republicans currently have a 21-12 majority:

* 13th, John Jagler, R-Watertown: Trump won the seat by 18.6 points. Under Evers’ map, the district registers a 50.2% GOP performance at the top of the ticket to 47.2% for Democrats.
* 17th, Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green: The southwestern Wisconsin district has been a perpetual target for Democrats. But the Joint Finance Committee co-chair won the seat in 2014 by 5 points and in 2018 by 8.2 points even as the district has been swingy at the top of the ticket.
* 19th, open: The Appleton-area seat remains a toss-up with an ever-so-slight GOP lean. Roger Roth, R-Appleton, is leaving the district to run for lieutenant governor.
* 25th, open: Democrats would’ve faced a challenge holding on to the far-north seat of retiring Minority Leader Janet Bewley, D-Town of Mason, whether it was Evers’ maps or the old district.
* 31st, Jeff Smith, D-Brunswick: Smith, a freshman who previously served in the state Assembly, became a top target for this fall after Trump won his seat 50.6% to 47.2%. The new district doesn’t change much and has a 49% Democratic performance to 48% for Republicans.

**Assembly**

Unless the environment improves for Democrats, Republicans will have a solid shot at a two-thirds majority in the Senate even under the new map. That could make the Assembly the Democrats’ focus against veto-proof majorities in both houses if Evers is re-elected.

Republicans now have a 61-38 majority in the chamber. Looking at recent performance with the new maps, there are 55 seats with at least a slight GOP advantage and 45 Democratic districts.

Analysts say the Democrats’ advantage in a half-dozen of those seats is less than 2 percentage points. In a tough environment, Democrats could come back in 2023 with about the same number of seats they have now even with a more favorable map. Barring a complete collapse for the party’s brand, the new lines should help keep a two-thirds GOP majority out of reach.

The new 37th is Democrats’ best pickup opportunity with its significant shift in their direction.

Meanwhile, the maps pair four GOP incumbents: Reps. Chuck Wichgers, of Muskego, with Cody Horlacher, of Mukwonago; and Dan Knodl, of Germantown, with Barb Dittrich, of Oconomowoc.

Dittrich announced she’ll seek re-election regardless of the final lines, vowing she won’t move in the process. That sets up a possible primary with Knodl.

That also may have helped Penterman’s decision because it means he wouldn’t be taking on a fellow GOP lawmaker in a primary for the district.

There’s currently no incumbent in the 38th Assembly District, to which Dittrich was elected. The seat has more than a plus-10 point GOP advantage and includes Marshall, Lake Mills and Watertown. It then stretches north to small communities such as Clyman and Lowell.

The new 24th, where Dittrich and Knodl are paired, pulls in Oconomowoc and the area to the city’s north before running east through Germantown. It’s also now a more than plus-26 point GOP seat. Knodl was a top target in the fall of 2020 before winning by just under 3 percentage points.

Here’s a snapshot of the most competitive seats under the Evers’ map:

* 4th, David Steffen, R-Green Bay;
* 23rd, Deb Andraca, D-Whitefish Bay;
* 30th, Shannon Zimmerman, R-River Falls;
* 42nd, Jon Plumer, R-Lodi;
* 49th, Travis Tranel, R-Cuba City;
* 55th, Rachel Cabral-Guevara, R-Appleton;
* 68th, open;
* 73rd, Nick Milroy, D-South Range;
* 74th, open;
* 85th, Pat Snyder, R-Schofield;
* 88th, John Macco, R-Ledgeview;
* 94th, Steve Doyle, Onalaska;
* 96th, Loren Oldenburg, R-Viroqua.

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