

10 big questions facing Florida politics in the wake of the redistricting decision

By [Peter Schorsch](#) -

Jul 13, 2015

SHARE

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)



As has been widely reported, the Florida Supreme Court ruled last week that the state's congressional maps don't meet the requirements of a voter-approved constitutional amendment that prohibits political lines from being drawn to favor incumbents or a political party. The court ordered the Legislature to try drawing the maps again.

Here are 10 big questions looming over Florida politics in the wake of the court's redistricting decision.

1. Will the Legislature appeal the decision?

USFSP political science emeritus professor Darryl Paulson says the Legislature should appeal.

"The Voting Rights Act was passed to expand majority-minority districts and then to preserve and protect them," says Paulson. "Now you have the Florida Supreme Court challenging four of the majority-minority districts that exist in the state of Florida, which to me seems a blatantly unwise policy."

"This to me is just a very bad decision on the part of the court," he contends. "I understand the rationale of people wanted them to do when they passed that constitutional amendment (the Florida Fair District amendments in 2010). But I am adamantly opposed to African-Americans and Hispanics having to face the brunt of this, and (are) likely in the greatest jeopardy of losing their seats after holding those seats for such a short amount of time."

Paulson thinks that Corrine Brown would seem to have grounds to challenge the Florida Supreme Court's ruling violating the Voting Rights Act.

2. What's the timetable for the Legislature to redraw the lines?

The Florida Supreme Court gave the Legislature 100 days to submit a new map. Normally, that would be enough time to resolve the numerous issues at hand, but, remember, the House and Senate are slated to start committee meetings in the middle of September. One would assume lawmakers would like to have a new map in the can before then. To accomplish that, they'd need to get started yesterday.

3. Who is driving the redistricting train?

It's almost difficult to believe Speaker Designate Richard Corcoran could become more powerful, but now that he, as the chair of the Select Committee on Redistricting, has the fate of dozens of Florida politicians in his hands, Corcoran is arguably the most powerful pol in Florida not named Rick Scott. Likewise, Bill Galvano, Corcoran's counterpart in the Senate, is a force to be reckoned with. **There is even the suggestion that he is the de facto Senate president designate.**

4. Who is hurt more by the redistricting decision, Gwen Graham or David Jolly?

The Tampa Bay Times' Adam Smith labeled Graham and Jolly the losers of the week in Florida politics because both U.S. representatives would have trouble winning re-election in redrawn seats. But who is the bigger loser of the two? Probably Graham because she has fewer options than Jolly, even if she has a brighter future. Graham can enter the race for the U.S. Senate, but what is her intellectual argument for doing so? That Patrick Murphy isn't a good enough Democrat? Would she really get into the race, split the moderate vote with Murphy and give Alan Grayson a genuine shot at the nomination? Then again, Graham cannot lose her CD 2 race and turn around and run for governor in 2018.

Jolly, meanwhile, has a better case for jumping to the Senate race — he'd be the sensible moderate in a field of conservatives, he's from the state's largest media market, he knows D.C. — but he can also do nothing. That's right, Jolly could just not run again, return to the private sector and probably make seven figures a year. What he can't do is be the sacrificial lamb for the GOP and lose in CD 13. It's the Senate or bust.

5. So Jolly for the U.S. Senate?

Yes. There's probably a 90 percent chance of him running. Although his camp says he's still only at the "seriously considering" phase, he's also locked up his major donors for a Senate bid.

(For the hardcore political junkies, think about how exciting the invisible primary on the GOP side of the U.S. Senate race is: If Jolly does enter the U.S. race, you will have the Pat Bainter/Data Targeting/Marc Reichelderfer/Sarah Bascom/Adam Goodman juggernaut on his side versus the On Message team, which guided Rick Scott to re-election and will likely help prospective candidate Jeff Miller versus John Konkus, and Jamestown Associates ((helping Ron DeSantis)) versus Rick Wilson, who is allied with Carlos Lopez Cantera.)

6. And Charlie Crist is in?

Redrawing CD 13 as the Supreme Court envisions turns a seat that has been held by the GOP for four decades into a lay-up for the Democrats. As POLITICO's Marc Caputo reports, Crist won 81-15 percent over Rick Scott in the Pinellas County corner that CD 13 will likely get from CD 14. And while the number of votes cast in that corner amounts

to just 12 percent of the votes cast in CD 13, Crist's win margin over Scott in those mostly African American precincts was bigger than his overall margin in all of CD 13. In other words, the mountain is coming to Mohammed.

So Crist would be crazy not to run, right? Doesn't he want to return to public office? Caputo is the one really driving the train on this story and there's no doubt he has well-placed sources telling him that Crist is thinking about running. However, at the end of the day, I do not think Crist pulls the trigger.

For one, I know Crist longs to return to the Governor's Mansion. If he runs for Congress — even if he wins — he can't turn around in 2018 and run for governor. Bob Buckhorn would have a field day. So, too, would the Florida GOP. Crist can get away with a lot, but not that. Second, serving in Congress is a young man's (or woman's) game. It's about seniority. Of course no one expects Crist to go to Washington and do much of anything, except prepare for when Bill Nelson retires, but even Crist's ambition is made of sterner stuff. Third, Charlie Crist in D.C. during the winter? Maybe for the White House Christmas party, but for extended period of time? Puh-leeze.

7. What about Dan Webster?

Webster's fate depends on several scenarios for Orange County. With District 5 no longer allowed to go to Orlando, the Legislature must do something about the African-Americans of Orange County. Right now the African-American population is in District 5. However, with District 5 now likely to go east-west, the African-American voters of Orange will have to go somewhere.

The Legislature will find little compelling reason to not put them in a district based out of Orange. One Republican-friendly idea would be for them to get put in District 9, the Hispanic-access, and safe-Democratic, seat currently held by U.S. Rep. **Alan Grayson**. However, doing so would dilute the Hispanic population, which the court could see as having clear partisan intent (packing all minorities to keep the other districts white).

The Legislature could try to split the black vote between the 10th, held by Webster, and the 7th, held by Mica, but that would also fall under judicial scrutiny. If either Mica or Webster had to bite the bullet, I would bet on Webster, who has been a congressman less time and has angered Speaker **John Boehner**.

If Webster were to take in the African-American voters, he would have to lose other population centers. The Legislature would probably remove the area south of Orange County, which narrowly backed Obama, to take a little Democratic punch out of the seat. Some other regions would also need to go to keep the population centered. Either way, taking in such a large number of African-American voters would change the partisan nature of the district dramatically.

8. If the congressional maps are unconstitutional, what does that say about the state Senate district maps?

Need proof that the state Senate maps are as obsolete as your MySpace account? Then look no further than Jack Latvala's decision to file for re-election in 2016. Think about that: Latvala believes so much that the maps will be tossed that he has filed to run for a seat not actually up for election in 2016 based on a court ruling that has yet to be written in a case that has not been heard.

Comparing the congressional map to the state Senate map is not exactly apples to apples, but when the Florida Supreme Court says it has problems with congressional districts jumping bodies of water, one can assume it will think the same way about the state Senate map.

9. Does the redistricting ruling impact the race for Senate president?

Imagine the race for Senate president between Jack Latvala and Joe Negron is a game of Monopoly, one in which Latvala is essentially losing because Negron owns the railroads, Boardwalk, Park Place and Marvin Gardens. How does Latvala turn this around? Sure he can roll double sixes again and again and run the table during the next round of state Senate primaries OR he can throw the board in the air and force everyone else to scramble over the thimble.

10. What does the redistricting ruling say about Will Weatherford's legacy?

As I read through the ruling last Thursday, I couldn't help but think of my friend, Will Weatherford, and how Barbara Pariente was dismantling part of his impressive legacy. Weatherford and Don Gaetz, as the chairs of the redistricting committees and as legislative leaders really, really, really went out of their way to avoid injecting

partisanship into the map-making. Sure, the consultants who worked near them ended up injecting partisanship into the process, but Weatherford had no part of that. Remember, this congressional map that is being thrown out led to a handful of Republicans losing in 2014. The map for the state House districts — the only one Weatherford really had complete say-so over and the only one of the three maps that has not been repudiated — saw several GOP incumbents drawn into the same district.

Weatherford has not publicly commented about the redistricting ruling, but I can imagine he's very angry at the decision. He may even believe that this was going to be the outcome all along once Amendment 5 & 6 passed.

Reporting from Mitch Perry, Matthew Isbell, and The Associated Press contributed to this post.