

THE SACRAMENTO BEE [sacbee.com](http://www.sacbee.com)

Dan Walters: Redistricting panel shows true colors of ideology

Published Friday, Mar. 25, 2011

If those who volunteered for the state's new redistricting commission believed that it would be a convivial civic exercise, last week's initial clashes over hiring legal and demographic advisers proved otherwise.

The decisions that the 14-member commission makes on 120 legislative, 53 congressional and four Board of Equalization districts will affect not only political careers, but the state's ideological ambience for the next decade.

An odd-bedfellows alliance of political reformers and right-of-center business and political groups, including former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, pushed two ballot measures that empowered the commission as the alternative to the Legislature drawing districts.

While reformers didn't like the self-dealing – creating districts that fixed election outcomes – business interests wanted to moderate the Legislature's leftward drift to improve their chances of thwarting anti-business legislation.

Both reformers and business backers believed that having an independent commission draw the districts would result in more competitive districts. That, in turn, would theoretically result in more centrist lawmakers, especially in concert with a new primary election system supported by the same interests.

The underlying stakes of redistricting were starkly evident in last week's maneuvering over the selection of advisers. The finalists for both contracts were seen by political insiders – and apparently by commissioners themselves – as having at least some political taint.

In the broadest sense, Democrats won on both fronts as the commission chose Los Angeles law firm Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher to give advice on the federal Voting Rights Act and Oakland-based Q2 Data & Research to help it draw the maps. The commission's five Democrats teamed with its four independents in favor of both, and the finalists viewed as having Republican ties lost out.

It became evident during meetings of the commission and its subcommittees that most of the independent members have a liberal bent. The Democratic members are also quite liberal, and the Republican members are moderates, or at least not strong conservatives.

Thus the overall tenor of the commission is definitely left-of-center – no small irony given the right-of-center support for the ballot measures that created it.

The 2010 census implicitly creates two somewhat contradictory mandates – to shift legislative and congressional seats from the Democratic-voting coastal strip to the Republican-leaning interior counties, and to create more representation for the state's fast-growing Latino and Asian communities, who together now comprise more than half of the state's population.

Given its emerging ideological orientation, how the commission meets those mandates will be, to put it mildly, very interesting.

© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.

Call The Bee's Dan Walters, [REDACTED]. Back columns, www.sacbee.com/walters