

LOCAL NEWS

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Watsonville may be moved to 27th district

Census data reveals shifting growth patterns

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Regional population shifts could alter Watsonville's political landscape for the next decade.

WATSONVILLE New census data reveals different growth patterns in the county's two Assembly districts. As state legislators begin redistricting, a once-a-decade process to adjust legislative districts to make

up for population changes, Watsonville could get traded to another district.

Assemblyman Fred Keeley's 27th district, a coast-hugging seat that takes in parts of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, lost 45,483 people during the past 10 years. Meanwhile, Assemblyman Simon Salinas' neighboring 28th district, which includes parts of Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties, added 66,321 people, the third largest Assembly district gain in the state.

Salinas, D-Salinas, represents Watsonville, a finger-like part of his district surrounded on three sides by Keeley's district. Since Keeley's district lost 45,000 people and Watsonville's population now stands at 44,000, shifting Watsonville to the 27th district presents an easy means of balancing the two districts.

Watsonville officials hope that won't happen. City Council members said the city's need for

affordable housing and economic development are better represented in the 28th district.

City Councilman Ramon Gomez, an outspoken supporter of Salinas, said he will introduce a resolution at the council meeting asking the Legislature to keep the city in the 28th district. Because Watsonville is an agricultural-based, Latino majority community it has more in common with communities in Salinas' district, he said.

"I think our voice would decrease (in the 27th district)," he said.

Keeley, D-Boulder Creek, said his office would play a small role in the process and his only priority was that redistricting adhere to state law. Salinas could not be reached to comment and his staff declined to discuss the subject.

In redrawing district boundaries, state officials will consider "communities of interest,"

a subjective term that allows legislators to consider geographically compact areas of similar racial composition, political boundaries and socioeconomic status.

John Laird, a former Santa Cruz mayor and Democratic Party leader, called the redistricting process "primal" politics at its most raw. For political junkies like him, he said it's an equivalent of the Super Bowl.

The new district boundaries are of particular interest to him. He is "looking very seriously" at a run for Keeley's seat in 2002 when term limits will end Keeley's reign.

He said moving Watsonville into the 27th district makes sense from a geographic point of view but weighing community of interest questions will be more difficult to sort out, he said.

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