

# Sen. Allen, Rep. Harper want to keep Pickens County in their districts during reapportionment

By Allison Dickens

*Special to the Herald*

Both State Sen. Gerald Allen and State Rep. Alan Harper say they want to keep Pickens County within their districts when the Legislature redraws lines this year.

Every 10 years, the Legislature is required to redistrict due to shifts in population indicated by the U.S. census, which also affects school districts and congressional districts.

Allen, R-Tuscaloosa, said that after hearing from the Pickens County community, he believes people's biggest concern is that they would "like to be sure they are treated fairly" — that the new lines do not split their county.

"It is going to be very difficult to keep things how they are," Allen said, because the changes cause a domino effect throughout the state, causing shifts in every district.

"I have not yet seen a map," Allen said, "although we are working to see where the shift of population occurred." Allen represents Senate District 21.

Similarly, Harper, R-Aliceville, said he has "pushed and made my feelings known that I wish (House) District 61 to remain intact."

He is hoping his district will extend deeper into Tuscaloosa County. "The district needs to pick up 4,000 citizens and will probably increase the district in Tuscaloosa County," Harper said.

Bonnie P. Shanholtzer, staff director in the Legislature's reapportionment office, said there are many factors to con-

sider while redistricting.

Senate District 21 comprises Pickens County and portions of Tuscaloosa County and Hale County. The district's current population is 140,682, and the ideal population for districting purposes is 136,563. All of the state's 35 Senate districts need to be about equal in population, as do all of the 105 House districts.

House District 61 comprises Pickens County and a portion of Tuscaloosa County. The district's current population is 41,422, and the ideal population is 45,521.

Allen's district must lose population, and Harper's district must gain.

Harper, however, said he does not foresee a big change within Pickens County occurring.

Harper's district must increase in population; therefore, he said, it is highly unlikely that Pickens County will be cut in two because its population is needed to meet the ideal population. As of the 2010 census, the population in Pickens County was 19,746.

Allen is a member of Legislative Committee on Reapportionment, which is responsible for drafting plans for the redistricting for both House and Senate districts.

Some legislators are also considering delaying redistricting and having a special session of the Legislature. But Allen said the work should be done during the current regular session.

"I say no," Allen said. "Let's do it now and save the taxpayers \$350,000 to \$500,000 it would take for a special ses-

sion."

Allen also said that if a special session is required, then it should occur within the current session to save money.

## HARPER'S RECENT PARTY SWITCH

Harper also discussed his recent switch in political parties from Democratic to Republican.

"My conservative political philosophies better fit with the Republican Party," he said. "My ideals and voting record are for what's best for the District 61 and the state of Alabama."

Harper's change will benefit the people of Pickens County, he said, because now that he is working with the majority party, he will have more influence that he can exert to pass bills that benefit the district.

When asked the negatives that were considered before his move, Harper said he had only one.

"Nothing other than hoping my move would not affect my friendships with members of the Democratic Party, and it has not affected those relationships."

Though Harper has changed his political party, he said his views have not been altered. "My support of business, education, new jobs and the well-being of the citizens at home are priority Number One."

*Troy University journalism student Allison Dickens of Ocoee, Fla., wrote this story as a part of a project partly funded by the Alabama Press Association Journalism Foundation.*

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