

# New districts to learn

## Unopposed candidates face challenges brought on by redistricting

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PRINCE GEORGE — State Sen. Frank M. Ruff Jr. needs to settle in for a three-hour drive from one end of the sprawling, rural 15th District to the other. Under the recent redistricting, he has picked up parts of Prince George and Dinwiddie counties after losing folks in the Farmville area.

"I'm about to wear out one car. It's been a challenge to try to meet folks," said Ruff, who is racking up miles to meet the new citizens, local governments and leaders of communities. He does not face an opponent this fall.

"The district is rural, even though it has a few precincts in the city of Danville," Ruff said. It now stretches from northwest of Danville, taking in the area around Lake Gaston before following Interstate 85 northeast toward the borders of Petersburg and Hopewell. Lost was a triangle from suburban Lynchburg up toward Interstate 64 and east to Farmville.

The changes — losing 110,000 constituents and picking up 120,000 new ones — are dramatic on a map. According to the Virginia Public Access Project, the new 15th District is 4 percent more Republican-leaning.

Ruff is a veteran legislator who served on the Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors for four years, followed by seven years in the House of Delegates. He won a special election to switch chambers in 2000. He lives in Clarksville with his wife, and they have four children, one in high school, two college grads and one serving in the Navy.

A handful of state senators and delegates representing the Tri-City area are not facing opponents this fall. They include Del. Rosalyn R. Dance, D-63rd; Del. Riley Ingram, R-62nd; Del. M.

Kirkland "Kirk" Cox, R-66th; and state Sen. Steve Martin, R-11th. All are covering different geographic areas due to the redistricting process carried out every decade, following new data from the United States Census.

Dance, a familiar face in Petersburg, is reaching out to her shifted 63rd House District.

"I actually have a footprint in five of the six localities" of the Tri-City area, she said. "That gives me five local government bodies that I need to be aware of ... how may I best be a voice in the General Assembly?"

Dance lost Dinwiddie County east of I-85, but retained the west side. The district leans 1 percent more Democratic. In Prince George, "I've got the back side of Fort Lee. That also throws some of the PG industry into my new district," she explained. "You start running to make your presence known."

Dance entered the assembly after winning a three-way primary and then a three-way special election in March 2005. She faced an opponent in 2005, but was unopposed in 2007 and 2009.

"It doesn't matter if I have an opponent or not, it's how I represent them," Dance said of her citizens.

A former Petersburg City Council member and mayor, Dance earned degrees from John Tyler Community College, Virginia State University and Virginia Commonwealth University, and spent a career at the Southside Virginia Training Center. She lives in Petersburg with husband Nathaniel Dance. The couple has two children and several grandchildren.

Cox saw a shift west for the 66th House district. He lost three precincts in the Chester-Enon area and picked up areas around Cosby High School. The district is .7 percent more Republican, VPAP data indicates.

"I sent an introductory letter introducing myself to all my new precincts," said Cox, who serves as minority leader, the No. 2 Republican in the House.

Cox is a Colonial Heights native. He lives in Colonial Heights with wife, Julie Kirkendall Cox, and four sons. A graduate of James Madison University, Cox teaches government at Manchester High School. He was first elected in 1989.

Martin's district also shifted, picking up the entirety of Amelia County and losing some segments of Chesterfield, including the Ettrick area. That increased the Republican leaning by 2.8 percent. The third-most senior senator heading into the next session, he has served since a 1994 special election. Martin previously represented folks in the House of Delegates from 1987 on. A Chesterfield native, he has two sons and two grandchildren.

Riley Ingram's district traded a large portion of Prince George County in exchange for more of Chesterfield. He now represents more folks in the Bermuda District, and along state Route 288. The district shifted 1 percent more Democratic but remains solidly Republican.

"I want to let the people know that I need their vote, that I need them and that my district is open," Ingram said. Aside from speaking engagements and meeting with local groups, he plans to advertise in local papers, and send out a questionnaire about issues before the legislature convenes.

Owner of Ingram and Associated Real Estate Co., he is a graduate of Prince George

High School and resides in Hopewell. He has three children and five grandchildren.

Local candidates see a potential for a shift in power in the contested races for General Assembly seats. On the Senate side, Martin is working for and contributing to contest elections. Republicans hope to overcome the current 22-18 Democratic majority, which would put the Governor's Mansion and both houses under GOP control.

"The majority of the Senate is really important for us," Martin said. "We can get more of our agenda through for our governor. We have some more areas of government we need to purge and merge."

In the house, the majority Republicans hope to extend their lead to pick up momentum.

"Our goal is 64. That's a realistic goal," Cox said. That would give the GOP an extra seat on committees. There are now 18 Republicans and two independent supporters, he said.

"A lot of people think we're doing things pretty good things in Virginia," Cox said citing polling data. "They're very pleased with how we've balanced the budget."

What are some of the top issues facing the General Assembly when they return to Richmond in January?

"As I've talked with people across the area, jobs are important to everybody," said Dance. Others concur.

"I was focused on jobs before the recession. That is still going to be the highest priority," Ruff said. Ingram, Dance and Ruff say Rolls-Royce's Crosspointe facility and the arrangements with Virginia's college and community colleges is the kind of workforce development sorely needed.

"With what's going on with Rolls-Royce and Fort Lee, the economy seems to be peeling pretty well" in Prince George, Ruff continued. "On the Danville end, it's pretty steep unemployment still. The focus that I've had for the last few years, is, 'how do we get out of this situation?'"

Citizens are saying jobs, jobs jobs to Cox also.

"I would say, if you're knocking on someone's door or you're at the fair, it's jobs, the economy. That just dominates everything," Cox added.

"Our budget this year's gonna be tight," said Ingram. "We've going to have to look at every angle." Ingram said the Tri-City area is well-represented on the House Appropriations Committee — the budget group — with Cox, Dance and himself serving.

The general economy is depressing home sales and income, he added.

"There are many people in Hopewell and Petersburg that do not have a job, and that's hurting people in this area," Ingram said.

Dance sees transportation funding "rising as that fourth priority" after education, public safety and Medicare. "There are no easy answers there. We have to really zero-in on some designated funds for transportation," she said.

Cox said there has been transportation projects in the area, and they hope to build on that success.

"There is probably as much activity transportation wise as you've seen in a while," he said.

Ruff said that funding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act — deemed Obamacare by many — remains up in the air.

"The biggest issue is the piano that's hanging over us from Washington — what's going to happen with Obamacare," he said.

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