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New congressional district has some concerned about impact on region's influence

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Local business leaders are concerned that the greater Glens Falls region will lose clout in a new congressional district that splits Warren and Washington counties off from the Hudson Valley.

“We’re concerned that Warren and Washington counties are kind of being pulled into the full Adirondack Park area, which is a huge geographic area with some significant differences between certain pockets of the congressional district,” said Peter Aust, president and chief executive officer of Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce.

And the Adirondack Council, a regional environmental organization, said that placing virtually all of the Adirondack Park in the same congressional district could dilute the region’s influence in Congress.

But U.S. Rep. Bill Owens, D-Plattsburgh, said rural communities in the district share agricultural issues, while Glens Falls and Plattsburgh share interests in trade and tourism.

“We all tend to benefit from this, and that’s a good thing,” he said.

Owens predicted people in the greater Glens Falls region will feel more comfortable about the new district once they get to know him.

“We’re prepared to work very hard to represent their interests. And clearly that’s going to mean getting to know folks, interacting with them and staying focused on their needs,” he said.

Owens will be the incumbent seeking re-election this fall in the new district, which a federal court finalized last week.

The new district would stretch from northern Saratoga County north to the Canadian border, and west through the North Country, encompassing all or parts of 12 counties, including all of Warren and Washington counties.

U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson, R-Kinderhook, will be the incumbent running in a new Hudson Valley district that comes as far north as Rensselaer County.

Aust, of the chamber, said the greater Glens Falls region has more in common with Saratoga and Rensselaer counties than with the Adirondacks.

He said the new congressional map seems to run counter to the state’s economic development structure that places Warren and Washington counties in the Capital District region.

“Just from an economic alignment, we really do align with the Capital Region more than the northern parts of the Adirondack Park,” he said. “So it’s going to be a challenge, I think, for the congressman representing us beginning in 2013 to really understand all the nuances and dynamics of ... what is currently transpiring here.”

Owens said that Glens Falls and Plattsburgh have a lot in common as far as economic development, tourism and transportation issues.

“What’s good for Plattsburgh, I think, is good for Glens Falls, and vice versa. So I see our interests as very much aligned, particularly along the (Northway) corridor,” he said.

Owens said he already represents a combination of small cities and rural towns in Congress, so he’s familiar with addressing diversified interests.

Environmentalists, meanwhile, are concerned about having a single congressman represent virtually the entire Adirondack Park.

Currently, the park is split between four congressional districts -- two represented by Republicans and two by Democrats.

Having multiple House members advocating for the Adirondacks increases the chances that regional issues will receive prominent attention, said Scott Lorey, legislative director for the Adirondack Council.

“In the past ... we had several voices in Congress, and often in the past few years of different political parties, so it was guaranteed that someone in the majority was representing the North Country,” he said. “So we think that having only one member of Congress represent the Adirondack Park is not necessarily a good development.”

Owens, however, said the park issues primarily focus around the Adirondack Park Agency, a state agency.

“Principally because this is an area that is largely controlled by New York state interests, I’m not sure it makes a great deal of difference that only one member of Congress represents it,” he said.

Matthew Doheny, who is seeking the Republican nomination to challenge Owens in November, said Adirondack Park issues would receive more attention with a single congressman representing virtually the whole park.

“If I’m elected, we’ll actually have all the Adirondacks. So I’ll be the one guy,” he said in a speech to the Warren County Republican Committee on Thursday.

Leaders of two local government organizations said they have mixed feelings about having a single congressman represent virtually the entire park.

“There’s probably some benefit to having the entire Adirondack region in one district. You may be able to focus more on Adirondack issues when it’s a larger percentage of the district. On the other hand, when you have multiple congressional districts, then you have possible multiple

advocates,” said Fred Monroe, executive director of the Adirondack Local Government Review Board.

“It’s certainly been to our advantage if you have more than one congressperson that’s doing something on your behalf,” said Brian Towers, president of the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages. “The positive part out of it is that somebody will certainly have much more have an insight into those Adirondack issues.”

Towers said Adirondack issues at the federal level are really not much different than rural issues in general.

“Certainly our issues tend to be more statewide because we’re the park and we’re constitutionally treated different,” he said.

Read more: http://poststar.com/news/local/new-congressional-district-has-some-concerned-about-impact-on-region/article_c61c451e-75e3-11e1-8d50-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1qEFHbLC2