

## Fla. redistricting map signed

A suit seeking to strike down the new boundaries was filed Monday. Six plaintiffs are from Tampa Bay.

BY ROMY ELLENBOGEN  
Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Ron DeSantis on Monday signed into law the congressional map his office created.

Within hours, opponents filed a lawsuit.

DeSantis' plan could add four more seats for the Republican Party. It also threatens to dismantle Florida's Fair Districts Amend-

ment, a voter-approved part of the constitution adopted in 2010.

"Signed, Sealed, and Delivered," DeSantis said on social media, attaching a photo of the new districts.

The governor's signature comes one week after his office first unveiled its proposal. Fox News received an exclusive, red-and-blue party-coded map before lawmakers did.

Lawmakers approved the governor's proposal after two days of a redistricting-focused special session.

Democrats decried what they said was a violation of Florida's constitution and a ploy to appease President Donald Trump, who has pushed red states to redraw their maps to keep GOP control of Congress.

Florida now joins the about

half-dozen states that have redrawn their maps after Trump's push, either in favor of Republicans or in favor of Democrats.

No Republicans other than the bill sponsors in the House and Senate spoke out in support of DeSantis' proposal during the special session. Five Republicans voted against the plan.

DeSantis' signature puts the new districts in place for the 2026

midterms.

But a lawsuit filed Monday by the Equal Ground Education Fund and a group of 18 Florida voters asks the court to strike the map down.

Six plaintiffs are from Tampa Bay, two are from Central Florida and 10 are from South Florida.

The plaintiffs, who filed in Leon County court, are represented **See REDISTRICT, 2A**

## US fights to reopen Strait of Hormuz

United Arab Emirates, merchant ships come under attack.

BY ADAM SCHRECK, BEN FINLEY AND SAM METZ  
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. military said it fired on Iranian forces and sank six small boats targeting civilian ships as it moved to reopen the Strait of Hormuz on Monday. The United Arab Emirates, a key American ally, said it had come under attack from Iran for the first time since a fragile ceasefire took hold in early April.

The U.S. military said two American-flagged merchant ships had successfully transited the strait on Monday as part of a new initiative.

The UAE Defense Ministry said its air defenses had engaged 15 missiles and four drones fired by Iran. Authorities in the eastern emirate of Fujairah said one drone sparked a fire at a key oil facility, wounding three Indian nationals. The British military reported two cargo vessels ablaze off the UAE.

Tehran did not outright confirm or deny the attacks but early on Tuesday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on X that both the U.S. and the UAE "should be wary of being dragged back into quagmire."

In similarly vague terms, Iranian state television earlier quoted an anonymous military official as saying Tehran had had "no plan" to target the UAE or one of its oil fields.

"The incident resulted from U.S. military adventurism to create an illegal passage," the official said about the oil facility attack, apparently referring to U.S. President Donald Trump's latest efforts to reopen the the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway for global energy.

Breaking Iran's chokehold on the strait would ease global economic concerns and deny Iran a major source of leverage. But such efforts also risk reigniting the full-scale fighting that erupted when the U.S. and Israel first attacked Iran on Feb. 28, prompting it to close the strait.

Shipping companies, and their insurers, are unlikely to take such a risk, given that Iran has fired on ships in the waterway and vowed to keep doing so. Iran has said the new U.S. effort is a violation of the fragile ceasefire that has held for more than three weeks.

**See IRAN, 3A**



Questions about the condition of the roof of the Marine Science Lab on the University of South Florida St. Petersburg campus have been raised after the fire on Saturday. (JEFFEREE WOO | Times)

## 3 things to know about the USF St. Pete building destroyed in a fire

The aging Marine Science Lab was built strong in the 1930s to withstand hurricanes. Saturday's blaze was another story.

BY LUCY MARQUES AND ALEXA COULTOFF  
Times Staff Writers

The University of South Florida's Marine Science Lab in St. Petersburg has 17-inch-thick walls, former dean Peter Betzer said.

They were built in the 1930s, when the building provided barracks for young merchant marines.

"That building is as good as any bank vault and would never be moved by any hurricane," Betzer said. "You could hit it with multiple hurricanes, that thing is incredible."

The roof — which former faculty mem-

bers say has likely not been replaced or renovated since the 1970s — was another story.

After it was set ablaze when lightning struck during a gusty thunderstorm Saturday night, faculty have questioned whether the building's old infrastructure contributed to the destruction of labs that held vital scientific research.

A university spokesperson could not immediately say whether the roof has ever been renovated. The Tampa Bay Times requested the lab's code inspection records from the university's Building Code Administration but did not hear

back late Monday afternoon.

The Times also requested annual safety inspections from the State Fire Marshal's office. A representative was not able to provide the reports Monday.

In 2022, Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed \$75 million that the Legislature had approved to build an upgraded facility. In subsequent budget cycles, the Legislature passed roughly \$34.3 million for upgrades, including hurricane recovery, but those efforts had not yet started.

Here's what to know about the building. **See FIRE, 6A**

## New FBI background checks could add more delays for immigrants, Florida attorneys say

Nearly 12 million applications are pending nationwide. Tampa Bay immigrants and advocates are watching.

BY JUAN CARLOS CHAVEZ  
Times Staff Writer

Ramón Pérez has been waiting for more than a year since he submitted his application for a T visa, a legal status for victims of human

trafficking, and completed his fingerprint background check.

Pérez was one of the victims of a 2024 crash outside Ocala involving temporary migrant laborers. The crash killed eight of his colleagues and injured dozens more.

Now, he could be waiting even longer after U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services confirmed it is tightening the vetting and screening of applicants using the Federal Bureau of Investigation database. "Things keep getting worse,"

said Pérez.

The change is part of an executive order signed by President Donald Trump in February. It applies to pending applications such as those for asylum, green cards and U.S. citizenship. Before, the agency used fingerprint background checks to verify identity and criminal history. Now, it is using a broader FBI database search known as the Next Generation Identification system that offers enhanced criminal history record information and inte-

grated capabilities to provide "the world's largest and most efficient electronic repository of biometric and criminal history information," according to the FBI.

"Processing is ongoing as we apply these enhanced background check requirements," agency spokesperson Zach Kahler said in a statement, adding that delays "should be brief and resolved shortly. USCIS will always prioritize the safety of the American people." **See DELAYS, 2A**