

Olsen wows Chamber crowd, which could help her in 2018

By John Ellis
jellis@fresnobee.com

On Friday morning, Fresno Chamber of Commerce CEO Al Smith thanked Assembly Republican Leader Kristin Olsen for venturing outside her district to talk about state issues.

Yes, it is true that Fresno isn't in Olsen's 12th Assembly District, which is based in Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties. But the Piccadilly Inn on West Shaw Avenue, where the Modesto Republican spoke at one of the Chamber's periodic Eggs & Issues breakfasts, is inside the boundaries of the 8th State Senate District.

It just so happens that Olsen has filed a "Statement of Intention" in Sacramento to run for the 8th State Senate seat in 2018.

Maybe it's best to call Friday's Fresno visit a very early 2018 campaign stop for Olsen.

It could also be called a successful event. Olsen — telegenic, well-spoken, knowledgeable, forceful — wowed the crowd of business and civic leaders.

Far from her district, Olsen still knew plenty of local people by their first names, and she easily fielded their questions about issues such as reforming the California Environmental Quality Act and how to fund road repair and maintenance in the state when gas-tax revenues are shrinking.

The 8th State Senate District is a sprawling piece of geography that covers all or part of 10 counties. It takes in about a third of Olsen's home county, Stanislaus, and even goes into part of Sacramento County. Fresno is at its southern end, but make no mistake, this is the heart of the district.

It's also made for a Republican to win, and last year, Fresno County provided incumbent Republican Tom Berryhill with about half of his vote total.

Olsen is termed out of her Assembly seat at the end of next year. If she decides to follow through on her statement of intention and seek Berryhill's state Senate seat when he is termed out in 2018, she'll have to do well in Fresno County to win.

There will be other viable candidates, almost certainly one or more from Fresno.

Based on Friday, Olsen got off to a good start in wooing the area's movers and shakers.

John Ellis: [\(559\) 441-6320](tel:(559)441-6320), [@johnellis24](https://twitter.com/johnellis24)