

# Senate and House redraw plans shuffle La. districts

By Mike Hasten

mhasten@gannett.com

**BATON ROUGE** — The House and Senate are scheduled to vote this week on plans that would reshape existing election districts and create new ones.

Many legislators don't like it because it forces them to surrender some current constituents and face voters they have never had to court. Also, the prospect of new challengers looms.

"It's never easy," said Rep. Rick Gallot, chairman of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee, which helped shape HBI, the House plan presented by Speaker of the House Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown.



Gallot

But the every-decade redistricting process is even more complicated this year by the major population shift spawned by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Some districts in New Orleans, where the population loss was worst, have to be dissolved, which forces incumbents to run against each other or surrender and give up their seats at the end of this term.

In central and northwestern Louisiana, lost population would force two Alexandria-area House incumbents into a consolidated district.

The new plans call for three new minority districts in the House and two in the Senate.

Initially, the House plan presented in committee had two minority districts, which Tucker said were needed to avoid "retrogression" — decreasing minority opportunity to elect a representative. The districts were in Acadiana and the

SEE REDRAW, Page 18

## Redraw

■ continued from Page 1

Florida Parishes area east of Baton Rouge.

But a majority of the committee agreed with Gallot that since the numbers were there for a fourth minority district in Shreveport, it should be created to avoid a challenge from the U.S. Justice Department, which reviews election changes to see if they comply with the Voting Rights Act.

Shreveport Rep. Barbara Norton fought the creation of the new district because she was concerned that it would decrease the minority percentage in her own Democratic district.

After the Shreveport issue was settled, the major arguments in the House bill focused on Alexandria and Monroe.

Democrats Chris Roy, of Alexandria, and James Armes question how in a region filled with Republicans they find themselves being thrown into a district running against each other. In a draft, Roy was supposed to run against Rep. Rick Nowlin, R-Natchitoches, but Tucker shifted the plan to have the two Democrats run against each other before he presented it to the committee.

The Rapides delegation plans to try to alter the plan on the House floor.

"It ought not to be about Democrat and Republican," said Rep. Herbert Dixon, D-Alexandria.

Alexandria Mayor Jacques Roy and Pineville Mayor Clarence Fields asked the committee to alter the plan because of the way it splits Rapides Parish but their request was rejected.

Rep. Nancy Landry, R-Lafayette, said the Acadiana delegation welcomes a new Acadiana minority district. "We're happy to have another voice."

Lafayette Parish's black population grew 25 percent in the past 10 years. But because the new residents were spread throughout the parish, there was not a way to draw a cohesive district without taking in other parishes, Landry said.

The district is based in Iberia and St. Martin parishes and takes in part of Lafayette Parish, including downtown Lafayette.

The growth in Lafayette forced districts to shrink, so lawmakers from other parishes have parts of Lafayette Parish.

With the new district, eight House members will represent at least parts of Lafayette Parish, geographically one of the smallest parishes in the state.

"It's about population, not geography," Landry said.

About 32 percent of Louisiana's population is black but demographers and legislators say there's no way to legitimately shape one-third of the 105 House districts and one-third of the 39 Senate seats so minorities could have a reasonable expectation of being elected.

In the Senate bill, SB1, Senate President Joel Chaisson, D-Destrehan, calls for two minority districts — one in the River Parishes region and one that starts in Rapides Parish and runs up to take in the Grambling area of Lincoln Parish and Natchitoches.

Sens. Joe McPherson, D-Woodworth, and Rob Marionneaux, D-Livonia, introduced bills to create only one black district, the num-