

North shore to gain clout in House

Redistricting unlikely to help River Parishes

By Bill Barrow and Ed Anderson

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With much of the chatter on legislative redistricting surrounding population losses in New Orleans and neighboring St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes, the political consequences of residential gains in other parts of southeastern Louisiana have been somewhat overshadowed.

Continuing growth in St. Tammany and Tangipahoa parishes, quantified by U.S. Census Bureau data released last week, ensures that the north shore House delegation will grow by at

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2010 census numbers for New Orleans area House district
GRAPHIC, A-5

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REMAP REQUIRES RUBIK'S SKILLS

DISTRICTS, from A-1

least one and possibly two seats when state lawmakers convene March 20 to redraw federal and state district lines. Including Washington Parish, the growth would push the north shore delegation to at least 10 seats in the 105-member Louisiana House.

"We have been under-represented for years," Rep. John Schroder, R-Covington, said, referring to steady population growth that is recognized only every 10 years following the Census.

Though Orleans Parish lost more than some demographers had projected, a key legislative leader said Wednesday that New Orleans will likely lose three House seats rather than the four that some city leaders fear. The additional seat is the difference between losing a quarter and a third of the city's House delegation.

Of some surprise, Jefferson Parish and the West Bank of Orleans posted modest population losses, while lawmakers representing St. Charles, St. James and St. John the Baptist parishes watched their districts grow. The Jefferson gains are not steep enough to threaten entire House districts, and the River Parish gains don't appear to warrant a new seat in that region.

The priority at next month's special session is to draw state House and Senate districts, along with state school board, Public Service Commission and judicial districts that are on the fall ballot. Lawmakers also have the task of reshaping the state's congressional districts from seven to six seats, a consequence of Louisiana's modest population gain trailing other states. But those seats are not on the ballot until 2012.

The ideal House district should contain 43,174 residents, which represents the state's population distributed evenly across the 105 House districts. Historically, the U.S. Justice Department allows deviation of plus or minus 5 percent, which this year yields a range of 41,105 to 45,332. Of 35 seats that are based in or reach into the New Orleans metropolitan area, only seven fall in that accepted range.

Minority losses unlikely

The issue is further complicated by incumbents wanting to avoid having to run against a colleague for re-election and by the premium that the U.S. Voting Rights Act of 1965 places on protecting the strength of minority voters. The law does not expressly prohibit reducing the number of minority seats, but in practice, federal voting rights attorneys are wary of any "retrogression." Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, who chairs the House committee responsible for drawing the lower chamber's map, has said a priority is maintaining the current threshold of 27 majority African-American districts, which will involve adding such districts in Baton Rouge and Shreveport as they are peeled out of New Orleans.

That standard also underscores the fact that changes — major or minor — in one district or parish don't flow easily into the next. That means any added districts in majority-white St. Tammany and Tangipahoa don't offset the loss of a district in Orleans Parish, where 10 out of 11 seats contained entirely within the parish are majority African-American.

St. Bernard, Lower 9 hit

Schroder's district is the most populous in the New Orleans metropolitan area, boasting 62,319 people, or 19,145 more than the ideal. The district covers parts of St. Tammany and Tangipahoa parishes, including Covington, Madisonville, parts of Mandeville and Hammond, Robert and areas near Loranger. He acknowledged Wednesday that he's going to have to give up whole sections, but did not say which areas he would prefer to sacrifice.

Eastern New Orleans, St. Bernard and Plaquemines saw the biggest population losses in the state.

Rep. Charmaine Marchand Stiaes' 9th Ward District topped that list. The district is almost 62 percent under the ideal population, with the Census Bureau counting 16,425 residents, almost 26,800 below the ideal.

Rep. Nita Hutter, R-Chalmette, had the second largest loss in the state with a decline to almost 22,000 below the ideal district population. Right behind Hutter was Rep. Reed Henderson, D-Violet, whose district's head count is 45.2 percent below the ideal population or 23,643. Henderson will be helped in redistricting by Hutter and Rep. Ernest Wooton of Plaquemines Parish being term-limited.

No one in eastern New Orleans is term-limited. Stiaes, Rep. Austin Badon and newly elected Rep. Wesley Bishop have given no public statements that they don't want to stay on the job. Yet the population east of the Industrial Canal will not support even two full House districts.

The New Orleans conundrum is eased somewhat by Reps. Walker Hines and Juan LaFonta announcing that they won't seek re-election, meaning their districts can be distributed among their colleagues who are seeking re-election and need additional residents.

LaFonta's district is expected to be divided among neighboring Reps. Walter Leger III, Helena Moreno and Jared Brossett. Taken together, those four districts, as they currently exist, span from Gentilly down to the French Quarter and the Marigny and up the Mississippi River through the Garden District and Uptown. But further Uptown, Rep. Neil Abramson needs more voters, as well. So, too, does Rep. Nick Lorusso, a Lakeview Republican who represents the only majority-white Orleans-only district on the 2000 map.

Lorusso said he could take some of Hines' district, which spans both majority-black neighborhoods and white Uptown enclaves. Abramson will also target some of those precincts.

All of the Orleans districts also can be expected to end up at the lower end of the accepted population range.

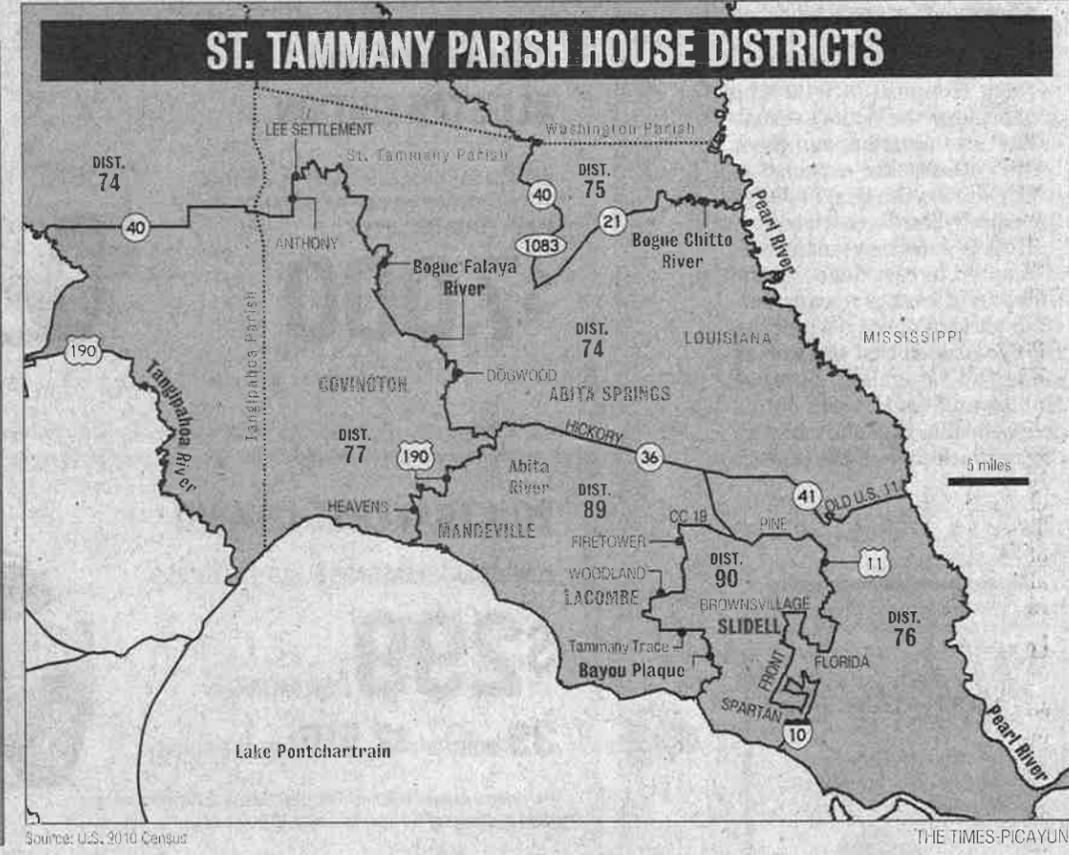
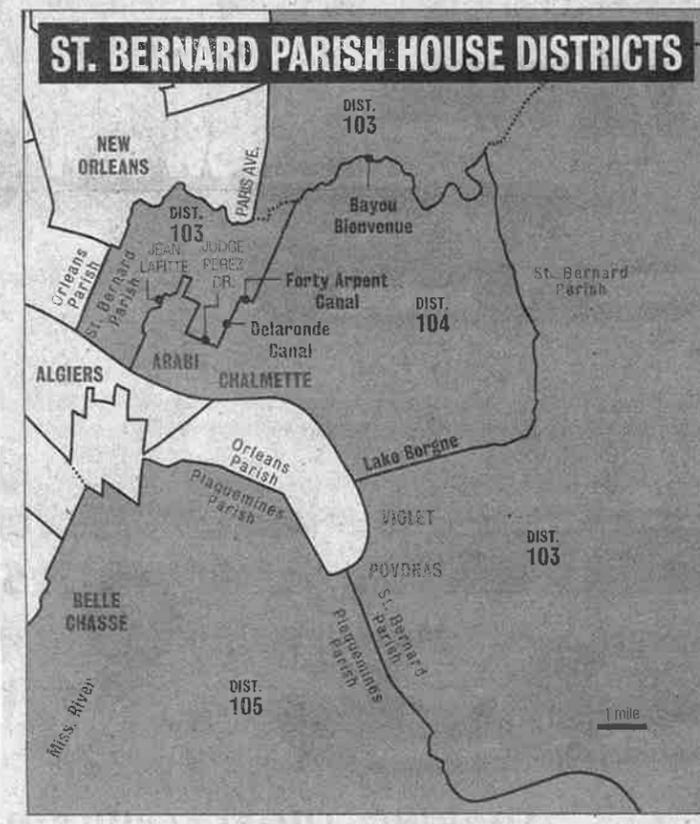
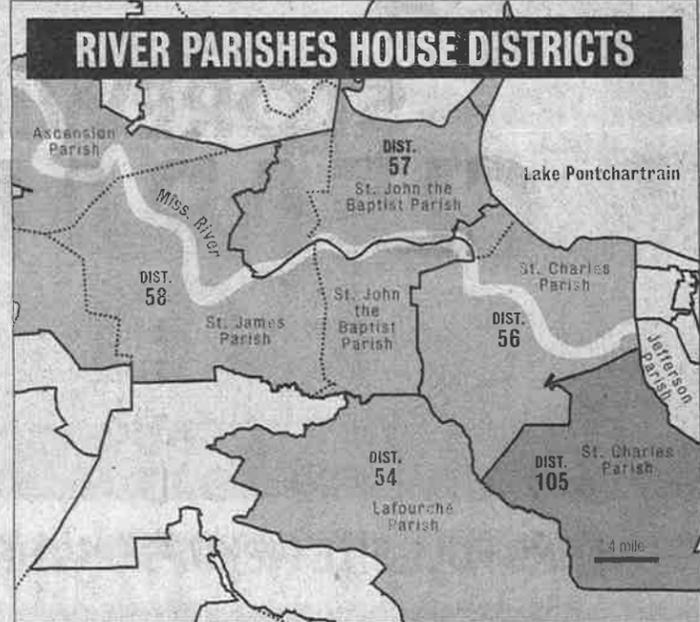
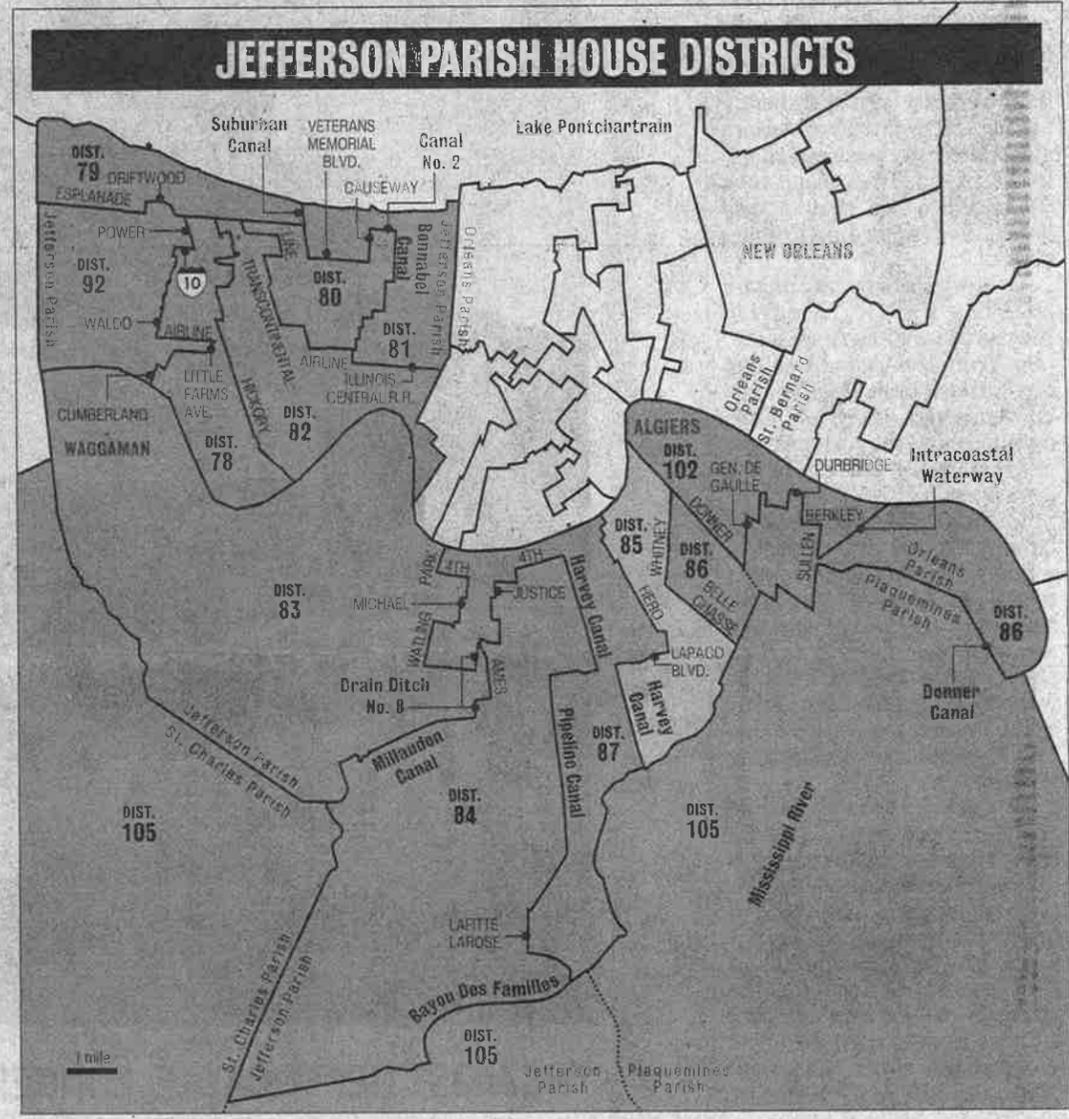
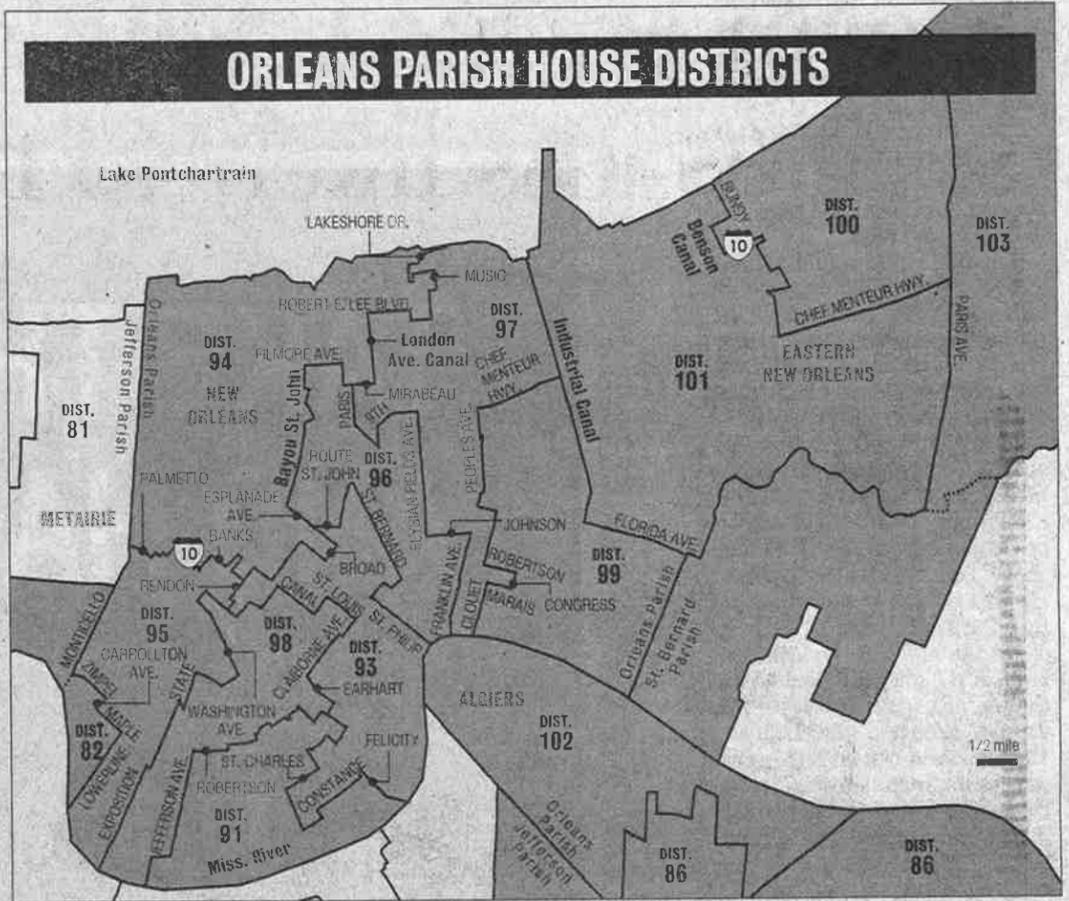
Lorusso said he has discussed the possibility of reaching into Jefferson Parish for some pockets of Metairie that are more politically aligned with Lakeview. But he said that could be complicated by several Jefferson lawmakers having to reach for additional numbers to hit the acceptable population range. The same holds true for West Bank Orleans districts now represented by House Speaker Jim Tucker and Jeff Arnold, both of Algiers.

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LOUISIANA HOUSE REDISTRICTING

The Legislature will convene March 20 to redraw federal and state district maps using data from the 2010 U.S. census. The ideal population target for House districts – the state's population divided evenly among 105 districts – is 43,174. Historically, the U.S. Justice Department allows deviation of plus or minus 5 percent, a range of 41,105 to 45,332. There are currently seven districts in the New Orleans area (in bold type) that are still at an ideal size.

District	Representative	Population	Ideal	Raw difference	Percent difference
54	Jerry Gisclair	44,453	43,174	1,279	2.96%
56	Gary Smith	47,201	43,174	4,027	9.33%
57	Nickie Monica	48,553	43,174	5,379	12.46%
58	Elton Aubert	48,350	43,174	5,176	11.99%
74	Scott Simon	55,721	43,174	12,547	29.06%
75	Harold Ritchie	44,623	43,174	1,449	3.36%
76	Kevin Pearson	50,170	43,174	6,996	16.20%
77	John Schroder	62,519	43,174	19,345	44.34%
78	Kirk Talbot	42,066	43,174	-1,108	-2.57%
79	Anthony Ligi	42,672	43,174	-502	-1.16%
80	Joseph Lopinto	39,354	43,174	-3,820	-8.85%
81	John LaBruzzo	42,777	43,174	-397	-0.92%
82	Cameron Henry	39,989	43,174	-3,185	-7.38%
83	Robert Billiot	38,305	43,174	-4,869	-11.28%
84	Patrick Connick	41,698	43,174	-1,476	-3.42%
85	Ricky Tempiet	43,859	43,174	685	1.59%
86	Jim Tucker	40,627	43,174	-2,547	-5.90%
87	Ginod Jackson III	36,307	43,174	-6,867	-15.91%
89	Timothy Burns	51,820	43,174	8,646	20.03%
90	Greg Cromer	45,481	43,174	2,307	5.34%
91	Walt Leger III	30,143	43,174	-13,031	-30.18%
92	Tom Wilmott	39,714	43,174	-3,460	-8.01%
93	Helena Moreno	30,550	43,174	-12,624	-29.24%
94	Nick Lorusso	31,652	43,174	-11,522	-26.69%
95	Walker Hines	34,279	43,174	-8,895	-20.60%
96	Juan LaFonta	24,700	43,174	-18,474	-42.79%
97	Jared Brossett	25,847	43,174	-17,327	-40.13%
98	Neil Abramson	30,348	43,174	-12,826	-29.71%
99	Charmaine Marchand Stiaes	16,425	43,174	-26,749	-61.96%
100	Austin Baden	30,223	43,174	-12,951	-30.00%
101	Wesley Bishop	25,026	43,174	-18,148	-42.03%
102	Jeff Arnold	35,477	43,174	-7,697	-17.83%
103	Reed Henderson	23,643	43,174	-19,531	-45.24%
104	Nita Hutter	21,315	43,174	-21,859	-50.63%
105	Ernest Wooton	37,348	43,174	-5,826	-13.49%



Source: U.S. 2010 Census