

House plan gives BR seats

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Tucker calls proposal 'starting point'

BY MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau

The Baton Rouge area would gain three seats in the Louisiana House under a redistricting plan presented Friday.

Over in the state Senate, East Baton Rouge Parish would pick up a sixth seat, and a new district would be created along Interstate 12, according to the plans released by the upper chamber late Friday.

The House proposal, sponsored by Speaker Jim Tucker, also would increase the number of majority-minority districts

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from 27 to 29, including one more for Baton Rouge. Majority-minority districts are where black people, Hispanics and other minorities in the overall population compose the majority of the particular election dis-

trict.

Tucker called his plan the "starting point" for redrawing the House's 105 districts to reflect population changes since the 2000 U.S. Census at a House committee hearing.

House members in the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus and the Democratic legislative delegation opposed the Tucker plan, arguing that it failed to create a 30th majority-minority district.

"We are looking to maximize

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Advocate staff photo by ARTHUR D. LAUCK

House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, gives an overview of what the Louisiana House's 105 districts would look like under his proposal to realign based on 2010 U.S. census data. Sitting at Tucker's side is House senior legislative analyst Patricia Lowrey-Dufour.

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the African-American districts in the House. We are 32 percent of the state in population. Having 30 seats in the House is not unreasonable," said state Rep. Patricia Smith, D-Baton Rouge, who chairs the Black Caucus.

An earlier version of the House plan would have added another majority-minority seat in the Shreveport area, she said. It was gone when Tucker presented the draft plan he plans to introduce, Smith said.

Tucker said a new Shreveport district could actually end up diluting minorities' ability to elect a candidate of their choice because the black population would be spread too thin to ensure a minority candidate would be elected.

Democratic representatives also questioned a last-minute change that would put two incumbent Democrats in the same district — they would have to run against each other — instead of pitting an incumbent Republican against an incumbent Democrat.

Tucker said he would continue to work with lawmakers on the plan during a special legislative redistricting session that begins Sunday.

"It's just the beginning," said Tucker, R-Terrytown.

Tucker said the plan recognizes areas of population growth and loss "in making certain that the people in those areas have adequate and appropriate representation."

Election districts must be realigned so they are somewhat equal in population. In the case of the House, the ideal population is 43,174 residents.

The metropolitan New Orleans area lost six seats because of declines in population.

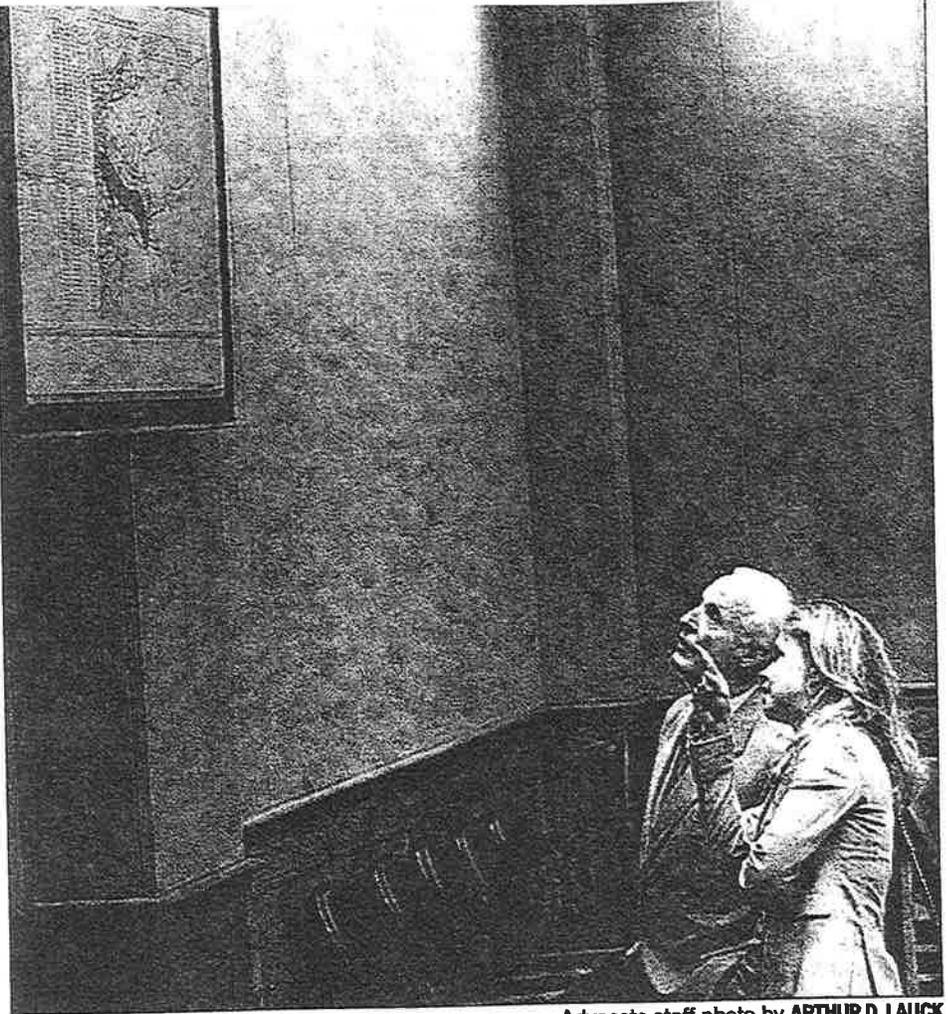
One new district would be located in East Baton Rouge Parish, in the north central area. Another new district would be in Livingston and a third would be based in Livingston but include parts of Ascension, St. John and St. James parishes.

Other new House districts would be located in Acadiana and in Tangipahoa and St. Tammany parishes.

State Rep. Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe, a committee member, also questioned Tucker on district changes that would require two Democratic representatives — Chris Roy Jr., of Alexandria, and James Armes, of Leesville — to run against each other this fall. The initial plan had Armes running against Rep. Rick Nowlin, R-Natchitoches.

Tucker said the decision against pursuing the additional Shreveport "majority-minority" district rippled into other areas, including Natchitoches.

Five sets of sitting House members would be thrown into the same election districts under Tucker's plan. However, in two



Advocate staff photo by ARTHUR D. LAUCK

State Reps. Mert Smiley, R-Port Vincent, and Helena Moreno, D-New Orleans, look over a map posted on a monitor showing how proposed House district lines would change in an area. House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, went over an area-by-area analysis during a House and Governmental Affairs Committee meeting Friday.

of the cases, at least one of the lawmakers involved has said he would not seek re-election.

Other head-to-head match-ups include state Reps. Wesley Bishop versus and Charmaine Stiaes, both New Orleans Democrats; and Republican state Reps. John LaBruzzo, of Metairie, against Nick Lorusso, of New Orleans.

Late Friday, Louisiana Senate President Joel Chaisson II, D-Destrehan, posted proposed realignment plans for the upper chamber's 39 districts.

The plan would create a new Senate district that would run from Baton Rouge to Hammond along the I-12 corridor, Senate Secretary Glenn Koepf said.

East Baton Rouge Parish would go from five to six state Senate seats that are either all or partly in the parish.

In addition, there would be a new majority black district in the Capital region that would start in West Baton Rouge Parish and run south down the Mississippi River

through parts of Iberville, Ascension, Lafourche, Assumption, St. James and St. John parishes, Koepf said.

The number of majority-minority districts in the state Senate would increase from 10 to 11, Koepf said.

State Sen. Bob Kostelka, R-Monroe, who as chairman of the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee leads the upper chamber's redistricting efforts, also prefiled a proposed remap plan for creation of six congressional districts.

Kostelka's plan retains seats based in Shreveport and Monroe. Four separate House drafts floated Thursday would put the two cities in the same Interstate 20 corridor district.

Kostelka's plan would throw newcomer U.S. Rep. Jeff Landry, R-New Iberia, into the same south Louisiana district with veteran U.S. Rep. Charles Boustany, R-Lafayette. The state needs to shed one of its seven U.S. congressional districts because of stagnant population growth.