

Plan shifts House districts, forces officials to compete

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By Mike Hasten

mhasten@gannett.com

BATON ROUGE —

Speaker Jim Tucker's proposed redistricting plan for the House of Representatives has raised concerns from incumbents who see their districts eliminated or reshaped to the point that some will have to run against each other.

Tucker, R-Terrytown, laid out his draft proposal Friday for the House and Governmental Affairs Committee to review. Immediately afterward, he admitted "Nobody's happy."

"It's tough" for lawmakers to eliminate districts or be forced to run in a district that contains few of the original constituents who put them in office four years ago, he said. "People work hard to get elected and then the population shifts."

He said he also feels for the lawmakers who will have to run against their friends. The plan, based on numbers from the 2010 Census, eliminates districts in New Orleans and creates six new minority districts in various parts of the state.

Tucker's plan creating a minority district that spans Natchitoches, DeSoto and Red River parishes shifts existing districts so that Rep. Chris Roy of Alexandria and Rep. James Armes, of Leesville, both Democrats, would run against each other in a newly constructed district.

Roy said Friday that he

hadn't seen the map yet but Tucker had called him early Friday morning to give him the news.

"It's odd that two Democrats are pitted against each other when in the original proposal (Natchitoches Republican Rep.) Rick Nowlin and

I were to be against each other," Roy said in a telephone interview. "It was to be an Alexandria-Natchitoches district but for some reason, that was all changed."

In the past several months, the political makeup of the House and Senate has changed from majority Democrat to majority Republican. The committees that consider the plans also have a Republican majority.

"Rep. Armes and I are best of friends and former seatmates, so this whole process is very disturbing," Roy said. "Neither one of us had any input into how this was done."

Roy said that with a three-week session, there's a chance to "modify things and go from there."

He was on his way Friday to Baton Rouge to watch his son play baseball

in a tournament and said, philosophically, "When all is said and done, going to see my son play baseball games in his senior year outweighs any anxiety about redistricting."

Nowlin said after the meeting that he's not too pleased with Tucker's plan because his house is located on the street that forms the border of his proposed new district.

"I'm less unhappy than I was last time when I found out I didn't have a district," he said. "My business and my legislative office are no longer in the district. God is good because I at least have a district. God bless Speaker Tucker."

With the change, "I've got 26,000 people new to my district," Nowlin said. "I'm losing more than half of Natchitoches Parish and half of the city. It's separating the City of Natchitoches from the Cane River Region, cutting it in half, so the cultural, historical and economic ties in the communities would be damaged."

The proposed District 24 that Nowlin could run in includes about 20,000 people in Sabine Parish, 6,000 in Rapides Parish and 17,500 in Natchitoches Parish.

The new proposed District 23, Nowlin's former district number, takes in parts of DeSoto, Red River, Sabine and Natchitoches parishes to make a 59.57 percent minority district.



Tucker



Nowlin