

AT THE SESSION

Remap battle begins

ES - 1 2011

Jindal urges bipartisanship at start of special session

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AMERICAN PRESS

BATON ROUGE — Legislators opened their special session on reapportionment here Sunday, and two lawmakers from Southwest Louisiana said they are unhappy with the way their House election districts have been redrawn.

State Reps. James Armes, D-Leesville, and Frank Howard, R-Many, will have to move quickly — beginning today — to try and make some changes.

Gov. Bobby Jindal opened the session with a brief message about Republican and Democratic legislators working together in a spirit of bipartisanship. He said former congressmen like Democratic Sen. John Breaux and Republican U.S. Rep. Billy Tauzin demonstrated it could be done.

“For the next three weeks there will be heated discussions, but that’s just part of the process,” Jindal said. “At the end of the process, we will heal our wounds and come together and work for the good of our state and our people.”

Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, chairman of the House Governmental Affairs Committee, said his group will start hearing amendments to a proposed state House realignment bill at 9 a.m. today. He said that is how lawmakers like Armes and Howard will have to try to change a House redistricting plan made public last week by Speaker of the House Jim Tucker, R-Algiers.

Gallot also said at a news conference following adjournment that he won’t introduce a bill changing congressional districts in a way that separates Lake Charles and Lafayette.

Three congressional plans by Gallot were introduced during a committee hearing last week. One he said he is dropping had Cameron and Lafayette parishes in a coastal district and Lake Charles in a district that reached Ouachita Parish in north Louisiana.

Calcasieu Parish legislators favor a Gallot plan that keeps their parish with Lafayette, Cameron, Jeff Davis and six other parishes.

Gallot said he only introduced the plan separating Lake Charles and Lafayette to show the complexities of redrawing election lines after every census.

Armes has been representing Beauregard and Vernon parishes, but Tucker’s proposal takes him out of Beauregard and puts him in a district represented by Rep. Chris Roy, D-Alexandria.

The state Democratic Party is unhappy that two members of its party would have to face off in the fall elections.

Tucker’s proposal gives Armes 23,535 voters in Rapides Parish and 20,785 in his home parish of Vernon.

Howard lost Sabine Parish, one of his strongholds. Tucker’s plan gives him 31,549 voters in Vernon Parish and 13,279 in Beauregard.

The changes were made in order to create a minority district that includes Natchitoches, Rapides and Sabine parishes.