

Lawmakers at odds over SW La. redistricting plan

BY JIM BEAM

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BATON ROUGE — Negotiations continued here Monday in an effort to resolve a reapportionment issue involving two Southwest Louisiana legislators.

A redistricting plan sponsored by House Speaker Jim Tucker, RAlgiers, shifted the districts of Reps. James Armes, DLeesville, and Frank Howard, R-Many. In the plan, Armes loses Beauregard and some of Vernon Parish. He picks up part of Rapides Parish under Tucker's proposal. And he would have to run against another incumbent, Rep. Chris Roy, D-Alexandria, this fall.

Also in the plan, Howard loses Sabine Parish, one of his strongholds, and picks up part of Vernon and Beauregard parishes from Armes.

The changes were the result of creation of a new minority-black district just north of those areas. The proposed district, which would be 59.6 percent black and 37 percent white, would be created using parts of DeSoto, Natchitoches, Red River and Sabine parishes.

One result would give Armes a district made up of 23,535 people in Rapides Parish and 20,785 in Vernon Parish. However, some 10,000 of those Vernon residents are at Fort Polk and most aren't registered voters, putting Armes at a voting disadvantage.

Howard would compete in a district made up of 31,549 residents in Vernon Parish and 13,279 in Beauregard Parish.

Tucker was asked about those changes during the House Governmental Affairs Committee meeting. He said he was working on the problem, but wasn't ready to discuss it.

Armes and Howard said later Monday they had an opportunity to discuss the situation with Tucker and Rep. Rick Nowlin, R-Natchitoches. Nowlin's district was also affected by creation of the new minority district.

Two incumbents in the New Orleans area are also forced to compete against one another under Tucker's plan. And the committee received a number of emails and other correspondence from voters upset about that change.

Those two are Reps. John LaBruzzo, R-Metairie, and Nick Lorusso, R-New Orleans.

Nothing was resolved Monday on any conflicts, but work on possible changes continues by staff members of the House Governmental Affairs Committee.

Tucker said the deadline for getting amendments to his House reapportionment bill is 5 p.m. today. The governmental committee will meet Wednesday to deal with those proposed changes.

Once that work is done, it will be more difficult to make changes in Tucker's bill when it gets to the full House later in the week.