

House plan adds fourth minority district in Shreveport

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BATON ROUGE

More debate is expected after narrow approval Wednesday of a controversial House plan that would make it easier to elect a fourth black state representative from Shreveport.

The House and Governmental Affairs Committee voted 10-9 to tack on an amendment by Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, to the main redistricting bill from

Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown.

Debate was long and at times contentious during the meeting. Besides attempts at predicting how the Department of Justice will view Louisiana's reworking of political boundaries, discussion came complete with references to God and accusations of deception.

Gallot's goal, he said, is to adhere to federal law.

"If you identify areas

where minority districts can be drawn, there is an obligation to do that," Gallot said about his interpretation of the Voting Rights Act.

Louisiana is among a group of states that receives extra federal scrutiny because of its history of racial discrimination.

Moving the borders for Shreveport-centric districts will affect several sitting representatives. Newly sworn-in Rep. Alan

Seabaugh, R-Shreveport, would be forced to run in the district currently represented by Rep. Richie Burford, R-Stonewall.

Rep. Barbara Norton, D-Shreveport, said the black population in her district would be diluted. As is, she represents a population that is about 88 percent black. Under Gallot's plan, the proportion of African-American voters would be smaller but still more than 60 percent.

Norton said Gallot left her out of discussions about his map. She urged colleagues not to believe when Gallot said he had talked to her.

"What was just said was a lie," Norton said. "I'm hoping and I'm praying that we as legislators will not come to this mic and lie on one another."

That didn't set well with Gallot.

"I've been called a lot of things but a liar is not one of them," Gallot said.

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