

Future of area House districts still unclear

BY JIM BEAM

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BATON ROUGE — The future of two House elections districts in Southwest Louisiana continued to hang in the balance Thursday after a committee had to halt its deliberations.

Because of 2010 census results, the House Governmental Affairs Committee has to redraw election lines for most of its 105 members.

Speaker of the House Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, is sponsoring the redistricting bill and had to leave town to deal with an emergency. The committee is expected to resume hearings on the Tucker bill 10 a.m. today.

Reps. James Armes, D-Leesville, and Frank Howard, R-Many, saw their districts drastically realigned in the original Tucker bill. They have been working with the speaker in their efforts to get the districts as close as possible to what they have been since the 2000 census.

Howard and Armes have both said the situation has been changing daily.

Armes has been representing Beauregard and Vernon parishes, but he lost Beauregard and gained Rapides Parish. Howard lost Sabine Parish and ended up with Vernon and Beauregard parishes.

The latest alignment the two men like has Armes representing parts of Beauregard and Vernon parishes. Howard would cover parts of Rapides, Sabine and Vernon parishes.

Rapides was drastically affected by the changes. House members and public officials from there objected to them, but Tucker had to leave before the issue was resolved.

Rep. Chris Roy, D-Alexandria, said the changes were splitting up the Alexandria-Pineville area. And the two cities were being linked to Natchitoches Parish with which they don't have a close working relationship.

The mayors of Alexandria and Pineville were particularly upset that the England Air Park Authority would be taken out of local election districts and placed in the Natchitoches election district.

"It is Alexandria's most important chess piece and a model of former base usage," Roy said. "This is just wrongheaded. This doesn't have to be done this way."

Tucker said he would continue working to ease some of their concerns before his bill comes up for a final