

House remap plan gains panel approval

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BATON ROUGE — The state House and Governmental Affairs Committee on Friday passed a redistricting bill that increases the number of minority districts statewide and reshapes many of the existing election districts.

Committee members voted 14-4 to send HB1 by Speaker of the House Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, to the House floor for

debate on Monday. From there, the bill would go to the Senate.

Under the new bill, minority districts would increase from 27 to 30, including one in Shreveport that was added in committee, making a fourth minority district there. New minority districts also would be established in Acadiana and in the Monroe area.

"As the plan stands today, we have, I believe, a good chance of pre-clearance" by the U.S. Department of Justice, which re-

views election changes under the Voting Rights Act, Tucker said. "I think the plan is an effective plan. I think it's one that will move the state forward over the next 10 years."

Tucker had drawn a plan that would have set the number of minority districts at 29. But an amendment raising the number to 30 was pushed by Committee Chairman Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston. It passed in a 10-9 vote, with some Republicans and an Independent voting for

the increase.

About 32 percent of Louisiana's population is black but demographers and legislators say there's no way to legitimately shape one-third of the 105 House districts or 39 Senate districts so minorities could have a reasonable expectation of being elected.

Lafayette Rep. Nancy Landry, a Republican, said the Acadiana delegation welcomes a new minority district because "it gives

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us another voice in the Legislature." The district will be based in Iberia and St. Martin parishes with a portion of Lafayette Parish, running right through downtown Lafayette.

In Monroe, the new minority district was to be placed in a district currently represented by Rep. Kay Katz, a Republican who cannot run again because of term limits.

Katz protested and won Friday when Rep. Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe, got committee approval of an amendment that restores much of Katz's district and shifts the minority district to another area.

Alexandria area lawmakers were not as fortunate. They were hoping for an amendment that would have solved problems with district lines slicing up the city.

But they did escape an amendment that would have Alexandria Democrats Chris Roy and Herbert Dixon facing each other in a race this fall.

Committee members decided not to vote on an amendment by House Speaker Jim Tucker that would have had Louisiana's central city primarily in a minority district pitting Democrat against Democrat.

Dixon now represents minority District 26, which straddles the Red River and encompasses residents in Alexandria and Pineville.

"Apparently the (House Speaker Jim Tucker) pulled the amendment that was going to be voted on with Dixon and me in the same district," Roy said.

As the House bill now stands, Roy would have to run against Democrat James