

Work stalls on House redistricting

By Adam Kealoha Causey
acausey@gannett.com

BATON ROUGE — Redrawing the map of Louisiana's 105 House districts halted Thursday when Speaker Jim Tucker had to leave the Capitol.

Tucker, R-Terrytown, was scheduled to ship his amended plan to the full House but an "emergency" prevented that, according to Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston. Tucker could not be reached for comment.

Gallot heads the House and Governmental Affairs Committee, which gets the first swipe at redistricting. Committee members will meet Friday, but perhaps with a different agenda.

"His availability will determine whether we take up House

Bill 1," Gallot said about Tucker and his proposal, which was scheduled to go to the full House Friday.

House and Governmental Affairs instead could examine boundaries for the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Public Service Commission, the Supreme Court and courts of appeal.

The committee spent much of Thursday listening to proposed amendments that would cut off voter precincts from certain districts and add them to others. Each change causes ripple effects — something central Louisiana officials said hurts their region.

Much of the first week of this special session looked at New Orleans, Baton Rouge and

Shreveport.

"I understand how this works. You go from the outside in," Alexandria Mayor Jacques Roy said. "The center of the state is sort of becoming the dumping ground for fixing everybody else's problem." Part of Tucker's map removes England Airpark from an Alexandria-based district to accommodate creation of Natchitoches Parish-based minority district.

Roy and his brother, Rep. Chris Roy Jr., D-Alexandria, said the former military base and home to Alexandria International Airport is Cenla's economic hub.

"Don't make us sacrificial lambs for political purposes," Rep. Roy said.

As it stands, Tucker's plan

includes 30 districts created to elect black representatives. That's up from 27 from the previous round of redistricting.

Shreveport includes one of the new majority minority districts. If approved, recently sworn-in Rep. Alan Seabaugh, R-Shreveport, would be pushed out of his current district and have to run against Rep. Richie Burford, R-Stonewall.

Redistricting happens every 10 years, following the Census. Political subdivisions must have roughly the same population. State House districts each should have about 43,174 residents.

Louisiana receives extra scrutiny from the Department of Justice because of its history of racial discrimination.