

Realignment of House districts in Rapides approved

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BATON ROUGE — After heated debate, the House on Monday granted Rapides Parish lawmakers' request to realign their House districts.

But the arrangement that Rep. Chris Roy Jr., D-Alexandria, worked out with

51-49 House approval could be in jeopardy today as Rep. Frank Howard, R-Many, pushes an amendment that would undo the deal and alter other districts.

Howard's proposal will be first up when the House convenes today at 10 a.m. to resume debate on HB1 by Speaker of the House Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown.

In a surprise move Monday, the House approved creating three legislative dis-

On The Web

To see the news release from Mayors Jacques Roy and Clarence Fields about Senate redistricting, go to www.thetowntalk.com, and click on this story for a link.

tricts within Rapides Parish instead of splitting it among four representatives, as Tucker's bill originally did.

Roy offered the amendment so he and Reps. Herbert Dixon, D-Alexandria and Chris Hazel, R-Ball, could represent the entire parish.

HB1, as approved by committee, would have split the parish among four representatives and shifted districts so that Roy

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was to run against Rep. James Armes, D-Leesville.

Under the amendment co-authored by Roy, Armes, Dixon, Hazel and Rep. Robert Johnson, D-Marksville, the Alexandria representatives keep roughly their present districts. But Rep. Rick Nowlin, R-Natchitoches, and Rep. Billy Chandler, R-Dry Prong, would run against each other.

Nowlin and Chandler argued against the amendment.

Roy recounted for the House how Tucker's plans initially had him running against Nowlin, then against Armes, then Dixon and, before the amendment, against Armes again. With his amendment, he's in a district with no other incumbent.

But as the House adjourned for the day, Howard was proposing an amendment that would undo Roy's amendment and affect several other districts.

"Mr. Speaker, it's nice to be loved in this chamber," Roy said following approval of his amendment.

"Can you feel the love?" Tucker asked from behind him.

"I can feel the love," Roy told the House.

The vote in favor was mostly Democratic, but several Republicans voted with the Cenla delegation.

Also on Monday, Alexandria Mayor Jacques Roy and Pineville Mayor Clarence Field expressed their concerns about the redistricting process, particularly a plan to split Rapides Parish among four Senate districts.

In a joint news release, the mayors said, "The carving up of Rapides Parish into four districts, with the population center at the tail of each of these four districts, shows a complete disregard for the contribution of Central Louisiana and Rapides Parish specifically to the region's growth and needs, while seemingly rewarding other areas of the state solely based on incumbency protection."

Mayors Roy and Fields

said, "Alexandria-Pineville commonality, at least in part, should retain communal ties and representation. SB1 achieves this in part but carves the district into a reverse 'spoking' district with four senators in a parish when there is a complete lack of community of interest consideration and compactness failure."

They added, "There is little to no respect for Rapides Parish community of interests. Drawing a district map allowing two senators to share responsibility instead of four sharing none would be preferable."

The remapping called for in Senate Bill 1 also "disallows the Alex-Pineville MSA from electing a senator. This is a community of interest 'insult' when coupled with the fact that not one of the other Senate districts touching the MSA has any core community of interests with us, and that each will have a senator in place in direct competition in the bulk of his or her core with the Alex-Pineville MSA."