

Redistricting plans clear committees

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Legislative redistricting plans cleared another hurdle Tuesday as House and Senate panels signed off on the other chamber's plans.

The House and Governmental Affairs Committee voted 11-6 for the Senate's plan to redraw its 39 election districts.

Senate Bill 1 goes to the full House for final legislative action.

Later in the day, the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee approved the House plan for its 105 election districts without objection.

Next stop for House Bill 1 is the Senate floor.

Approvals came with Senate President Joel Chaisson II, D-Destrehan, and House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, encouraging their members to leave the other chamber's plan unaltered.

"You know how hard they worked on their plan, and we worked on ours," Chaisson said.

State Sen. Dan Claitor, R-Baton Rouge, originally tried to delay a vote on the House plan, noting three state representatives had filed plans to redraw Senate district lines.

Claitor backed off after state Sen. Ed Murray, D-New Orleans, said he had filed legislation redrawing House lines just



Advocate staff photo by TRAVIS SPRADLING

Senate President Joel Chaisson II, D-Destrehan, at microphone, and Senate Secretary Glenn Koepp, at his side, testify in a House committee Tuesday for the Senate's plan to draw its 39 election districts. House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, right rear, visits with committee member Cameron Henry, R-New Orleans. Later in the day, Chaisson sat beside Tucker as a Senate committee took up the House plan dividing up its 105 districts.

in case representatives started meddling.

The Legislature is in special session for the federally required drawing of election district lines to reflect population changes since the 2000 U.S. census. The districts must be drawn so that population is equalized among them.

Both SB1 and HB1 create new Baton Rouge-area districts because of big population gains

in the past decade. Losing districts is the New Orleans area, hard hit by population losses in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

The capital region gets a fourth Senate district that's primarily based in East Baton Rouge Parish. Part of the region is also included in a new Mississippi River parishes majority black district.

The House plan contains three new Baton Rouge-area

House districts, including one of the new majority black districts created.

Both plans increase the number of majority black districts.

In HB1, there would be 29 black districts — up from 27.

In SB1, there would be 11 black districts — up from 10.

Chaisson said there was an opportunity to draw another majority black Senate district in north-central Louisiana and

that his plan does that.

"You have heard ... it could be drawn more compactly but it would have put two Republican senators in a race against each other. I chose to preserve

the core of those districts and protect those incumbents," Chaisson told the House panel.

State Rep. Herbert Dixon, D-Alexandria, didn't like that the creation of the district would put parts of Rapides Parish in four Senate districts.

State Rep. Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe, questioned Chaisson's choice of incumbency protection over district compactness.

Chaisson said the district may look strange but that it was not drawn for "racial gerrymandering" purposes. Rather, it was done to protect minority voting strength, he said.

In the Senate committee, Tucker ran into questions about the House plan's failure to include a 30th majority minority district in Shreveport.

State Sen. Lydia Jackson, D-Shreveport, noted a 30th district was included in a draft House plan.

Looking more closely at population and voter participation, Tucker said "the 30th district did not seem to be an effective (minority) district."