

GOP to target census tally of illegal immigrants

Goal is preserving La. seat in Congress

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BATON ROUGE — The chairman of the state Republican Party said Saturday the state party is looking at ways to prevent “illegal aliens” from being counted in the 2010 federal census. The goal is to preserve a congressional seat for Louisiana, he said.

Roger Villere of Metairie told the Republican State Central Committee, the party’s governing board, that if illegal immigrants are counted in the census, Louisiana likely will see its congressional delegation drop from seven to six House members. House seats are apportioned based on each state’s population in the census.

Villere said states such as Texas and California would pick up representation in Congress because of the large number of immigrants living in them. Federal policy is to count all residents, regardless of their legal status, at the time the census is taken.

“If they do not count the illegal aliens, we would not lose a seat” despite population declines caused by recent hurricanes, Villere said.

“We feel like we need to protect our sovereignty,” he said. “If we take the illegals out of the mix, we could retain one of our congressmen. . . . We are investigating our options. This is something we are seriously looking at.”

Villere said a decision will be made by year’s end on whether to file a lawsuit or lobby the administration and Congress for a policy change to exclude illegal immigrants. He said he has been in discussions with “people

of national stature” on the matter but refused to name them.

“It is not a Republican problem,” he said after the committee’s quarterly meeting. “It is a Louisiana problem.”

Earlier, U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, estimated that 8 million illegal immigrants living in the country are now getting health care paid for by taxpayers.

During the meeting, committee members rejected a plan to hold a nominating convention in Lafayette, Baton Rouge or New Orleans next year to rally the party around one candidate each for a U.S. Senate race and the seven congressional seats.

A convention would energize and unify the party while drawing media attention, according to main proponent Mike Chittom of Baton Rouge.

But Anthony Emmons of Acadia Parish said a convention would signal that the state GOP is “the party of the elite” by allowing only a handful of Republicans to have a say on nominees.

“A small group can manipulate the system,” said Billy Johnson II of Columbia. “We are trying to expand the party.”

Mike Bayham of St. Bernard Parish said state law requires parties to pick their candidates in federal elections through party primaries and runoffs. Proponents say a convention could help winnow the field of those entering a primary or could be used to endorse a candidate.

Bayham said a convention could be considered for statewide and legislative races in 2011.

Before the state committee’s meeting began, state Health and Hospitals Secretary Alan

Levine told a breakfast gathering of Republicans that if the federal government does not address a Medicaid formula problem affecting the state, Louisiana faces a loss of \$700 million in federal money in 2011 for programs helping the poor.

Even though he and Gov. Bobby Jindal have been critical of President Barack Obama’s health care plan, Levine said he does not think their position will hurt the state’s chances of getting federal relief from a looming \$700 million cut in Medicaid money.

“I dare them to do that,” Levine said. “I think they are bigger than that. . . . The purpose of government is to provide an opportunity for those who do not have an opportunity to do . . . for themselves,” not to cheat poor people of needed services.

Levine said he is “proud our governor is speaking out” in criticism of a U.S. House version of the health care reform bill. Under it, he said, the percentage of the state’s population eligible for Medicaid would climb from 26 percent to 44 percent and taxpayers would have to bear the cost.

Levine said the House bill borders on socialism because under it government would inject itself in the way a service is delivered.

“This is clearly an attempt by government to run health care,” Scalise told the GOP committee. “These are the same people who gave us ‘Cash for Clunkers,’” the program encouraging trade-ins of older cars for more fuel-efficient vehicles, “that ran out of money in the first week.”

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