



State's electoral map to be redrawn

One congressional seat to almost certainly be lost

By Stephen Largen • slargen@monroe.gannett.com • September 13, 2010

Census operations in Louisiana are largely complete, but the politics of redistricting are just beginning to unfold.

Louisiana is one of a small number of states, including Mississippi, that will receive census data from this year's decennial count early next year from the U.S. Census Bureau, a few months before other states because Louisiana must redraw not only U.S. Congressional Districts, but also state House, Senate and other legislative districts before qualifying begins next fall.

Complicating matters for the members of Louisiana's House and Senate Governmental Affairs Committees — who are charged with redrawing the state's electoral map — is the fact that Louisiana is also one of seven states that as part of the Voting Rights Act must get preclearance for its new district map from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Because of negligible population growth relative to other states since 2000, experts say Louisiana will almost certainly lose one of its seven congressional seats.

Carving up six House districts instead of seven is where the political hardball comes in.

Last year, State Sen. Bob Kostelka, the chairman of the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee, pledged to do everything in his power to preserve a northeastern Louisiana congressional district that does not include the northwestern Louisiana metro area.

Kostelka, a Republican from Monroe, says he's merely pledging to preserve northeastern Louisiana's electoral voice.

Census data released in recent years suggests northeastern Louisiana and the New Orleans area will show the biggest population drop-offs since

2000 when decennial census results used for redistricting are released next year.

Were the current 5th Congressional District to be expanded to include the northwestern Louisiana metro area, 5th District Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, would be at a distinct electoral disadvantage because he would likely be forced to run against a candidate from northwest Louisiana who would be able to draw support from the more populous hubs of Shreveport and Bossier City.

Kostelka, who was criticized after making the pledge by redistricting experts like Shreveport demographer Elliott Stonecipher, didn't soften his stance Friday.

"I will do everything I can to oppose that," Kostelka said of the possibility of a Shreveport-Monroe congressional district.

Asked if his pledge was part of the political gamesmanship surrounding the redistricting process, Kostelka responded by saying that "I hope it's not a political process."

DOJ approval complicates process

A similar fight is brewing in south Louisiana.

The 2nd Congressional District now includes most of New Orleans and parts of Jefferson Parish, but based on some projections New Orleans could be

Advertisement

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momlike.me
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



forced to share a district with parts of the Baton Rouge metro area because of population loss in the New Orleans area.

Stonecipher said efforts to preserve districts when population shifts don't justify the moves is "what yields a plan DOJ will not approve."

DOJ looks for maps that are "pleasing to the eye," and don't contain oddly-shaped districts that could suggest gerrymandering has occurred, he said.

House and Governmental Affairs Committee chairman Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, said he hopes the Legislature, which will likely be called into a special redistricting session, will be able to send its new map to DOJ in April.

DOJ would then have 60 days to approve the map or send it back to the state for revisions.

Stonecipher said If DOJ does not grant approval to Louisiana's first map submission, the state will be hard pressed to finalize districts before fall qualifying.

A hail of lawsuits seeking to enjoin specific elections could follow if the Secretary of State calls for the elections (the legal mechanism by which elections take place in the state) before DOJ gives its approval.

Kostelka said he'll journey to Washington, D.C. this fall to meet with DOJ officials and "try to convince them that Louisiana is not going to do anything wrong."

Getting 'personal'

Gallot said there's no way to completely take politics out of the redistricting process.

Politics still intrude even in states with nonpartisan redistricting commissions, he said.

Gallot said he hopes Gov. Bobby Jindal will leave the Legislature to complete the map and not interject himself into the process.

In response, Jindal's spokesman Kyle Plotkin said, "The census report is still months away from being issued and we will review the legislative

redistricting process when the time comes."

Both houses of the Legislature must approve the state's new electoral map, and the governor has veto power over the plan.

Gallot said he's told the members of House and Governmental Affairs, who all requested spots on the influential committee, that they're about to be under the microscope.

"They will be called upon to make some of the toughest decisions they'll ever have to make," Gallot said.

"Redistricting gets personal."

Advertisement

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslime.com
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™