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BRIEFING BOOK

News and views from the Louisiana Capitol

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AROUND THE CAPITOL

Tough redistricting tasks ahead

An official census count will not be available until late 2010 or early 2011. But that hasn't stopped state lawmakers and bureaucrats from preparing for a more-complicated-than-usual revamp of Louisiana's congressional and legislative districts. The reason: the post-Katrina population shifts and the state's overall lagging growth rate in comparison to other states. Rep. Rick Gallot, chairman of the House committee that will do much of the redistricting work, said it's likely Louisiana would have lost a congressional seat even without the Katrina-related losses. Now it's virtually certain. Gallot said he will proceed with a few rules: Given federal law, one of the new congressional districts will remain majority African-American. There's already a model with a Public Service Commission district that includes heavily African-Communities in East Baton Rouge Parish and Orleans Parish. Whatever the solution, the results could pit two incumbents against one another. Perhaps the most likely, Gallot said, are Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, from the 5th District in northeast Louisiana, and newly elected Rep. John Fleming, R-Minden, from 4th District in northwest Louisiana. Katrina certainly makes redrawing legislative lines much harder, Gallot said, though he declined to speculate about specific districts or incumbents. Gallot said state and local officials are already in the process of gathering data, from postal and utility information to the voting records of specific precincts and school enrollment records. "We're trying to figure out where the people are as early as we can," he said.