

# Making census count

## Statewide meetings raise awareness on redistricting

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The second of nine statewide meetings on redistricting was held Tuesday at McNeese State University.

The meeting, a pre-census public forum, was conducted by Louisiana House of Representatives staff members, who traveled from Baton Rouge to give presentations on redistricting law, census estimates for the region and the timeline for 2011 redistricting.

The forum was led by Rep. Rick Gallot Jr., D-Ruston, who is chairman of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee. Speaking were Patricia Lowrey-Dufour, legislative analyst; Mark Mahaffey, attorney for the committee; and Alfred Speer, clerk of the House.

Area lawmakers, local officials and a sprinkling of residents attended.

Gallot said goals of the forums are to raise awareness of the 2010 census and to generate public input. Those attending Tuesday's forum were able to ask questions.

Other forums are planned in Alexandria, Lafayette, Thibodaux, Slidell, New Orleans, Shreveport and Monroe. All will be held before Census Day, April 1.

"We wanted to educate the general public about the process of redistricting, and we wanted to bring the training to legislators in the state," Gallot said.

He said public hearings on the detailed plan will be held around March 2011. He said the state's constitutional deadline for redistricting is Dec. 31, 2011.

Redistricting is the process of redrawing the boundary lines of districts from which public officials are elected. Gallot said the purpose is to ensure that every person has an equal voice in government.

Lowry-Dufour, who spoke about census data, said that because of the lack of population growth over the last 10 years, Louisiana is expected to lose a congressional seat.

Lowry-Dufour gave a breakdown of population trends over the last few decades. She said the biggest shifts have been in the northeast part of the state and in hurricane-affected areas.

State officials are urging people to complete census questionnaires to get the most-accurate count of residents.

Lowry-Dufour said it is estimated that each person unaccounted for will cost the state about \$1,300 a year.

Danielle Edwards, partnership specialist with the Census Bureau, also spoke Tuesday and said that the Census Bureau has been "educating" and "motivating" people nationwide to take part in the count.

This year's census will have 10 questions. A preview of the form can be viewed online.

"It is the one civic moment that involves each one of us in the United States of America," Edwards said.

She said the census will employ 1.4 million people around the country and thousands in the state.

The census affects political representation on the federal, state and local levels and directs the allocation of billions of federal dollars in government funding to the states.

After the census is completed, the number of congressional seats for each state is determined according to population or reapportionment. Once this is done, redistricting begins.

The Legislature will redraw congressional, legislative, Public Service Commission, BESE and Supreme Court districts according to population changes.

On the Net:

[http://house.louisiana.gov/H\\_Redistricting2011/;](http://house.louisiana.gov/H_Redistricting2011/)