

Date: Feb 22, 2011; Section: Front Page; Page: A1

Voters invited to weigh in Legislators in town to talk redistricting

BY ERIC CORMIER AND JOHN GUIDROZ

AMERICAN PRESS

Residents can offer opinions about local, state and congressional redistricting at a hearing at 10 a.m. today, Feb. 22, at the Lake Charles Civic Center Buccaneer Room.

The meeting is one of several that members of the state House and Senate Governmental Affairs committees are conducting around the state.

State Rep. Mike Danahay, D-Sulphur, said about 300 people attended Monday's meeting in Houma.

He said residents voiced concerns about keeping Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes in the same U.S. House district.

Danahay encouraged Southwest Louisiana residents to express their views on the redrawing of boundaries. He said lawmakers will consider the input when they draw up proposals for new districts.

"It's a work in progress," he said. "We have not sat down as a committee and developed any plan, so far."

House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, said that House lawmakers will not create any voting district maps until after the public hearings are done.

He spoke on the subject Monday to members of the American Press editorial board.

In regards to legislative districts, Tucker said Southwest Louisiana will be "one of the easiest areas in the state to deal with."

The biggest problem, he said, is preserving the number of minority districts. The House has 27; the Senate has 10.

Tucker said the state could have its first Hispanic districts, as the Latino population in the Kenner-Metairie area is now close to 30,000.

Tucker said he does not believe that Calcasieu Parish will share a U.S. House seat with Shreveport.

"It's not just about numbers," he said. "It's about like causes (and) commonalties of interest in a district."

Tucker said the proposed single coastal district is "very problematic" because it reduces the influence of the lawmaker who will represent the coast at the federal level.

"I think its better to have more (congressmen) than less," Tucker said. "I think that's going to be the prevailing thought on one coastal district."

