

Group proposes merging two U.S. House districts

BY SHAWN MARTIN AMERICAN PRESS

The Louisiana Family Forum has proposed a congressional redistricting map that reflects the state's decreased population and likely loss of a U.S. House seat after the 2010 census.

"The plan was circulated to legislators and media outlets throughout Louisiana as a starting point for discussion on how the congressional lines should be redrawn," said Gene Mills, executive director of the group and president of LFF Action. "It is no secret that Louisiana is expected to lose a congressional seat following the 2010 census."

Mills discussed the plan Thursday at the American Press.

With him were Family Forum employees Dale Hoffpaur, who is the chief financial officer, and April Altazan.

The group is on a six-city tour to talk about emergency preparedness and other issues facing churches today. The stops include pastors' roundtables, media visits and receptions.

"It is expected that Louisiana will lose a congressional seat after the 2010 census. Our plan takes that likelihood into consideration, combining the current District 3 and District 2 seats to reflect the large population loss from Hurricane Katrina," Mills said. "The remaining five districts remain basically unchanged and give continuity to Louisiana's historical districts, while maintaining a majority 'minority district,'" he said.

The state's largest loss of population is in the New Orleans area, which has not returned to its pre-Katrina numbers.

Mills said the newly drawn southeastern Louisiana district would resemble Democrat Hale Boggs' district of the 1950s.

Hoffpaur said that while other parts of the state have seen a population increase, the southeastern portion of the state has suffered a decline — mainly because of Katrina in 2005.

"We know there are going to be a lot of plans floating around out there before one is settled on," he said.

Any redistricting plan must ultimately be approved by the state Legislature and the U.S. Justice Department.

Louisiana Family Forum, based in Baton Rouge, is affiliated with Focus on the Family.

It is "dedicated to being a voice for traditional families in Louisiana" based on biblical principles "to both prevent further destruction of family values and encourage the return of those values to their rightful places," according to its Web site.

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