

Analyst: Kostelka playing hardball

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Criticism deals with redistricting talk

By Stephen Largent

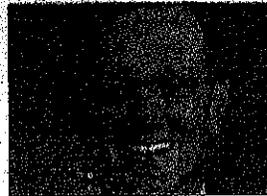
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Shreveport demographer and political analyst Elliott Stonecipher is leveling serious criticism of state Sen. Bob Kostelka's pledge to

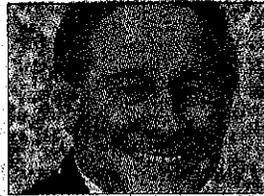
do everything in his power to make sure northeastern Louisiana will not be lumped into a congressional district that includes Shreveport and Bossier City, warning that doing so could create ill will aimed at northeastern Louisiana during future legislative sessions.

"Bob Kostelka cannot be appealed to on the basis of good government," Stonecipher said.

"If he does, and the (population) numbers end up staying the same way they are now, and Chairman Kostelka keeps to his promise, you're



Stonecipher



Kostelka

going to end up with a lot of people in Louisiana upset."

Kostelka, a Republican from Moriwoe and the chairman of the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee, along with his committee and the House and Governmental

Affairs Committee, will be charged with redrawing political district lines following the 2010 census. He reiterated his pledge to preserve a northern district that excludes the Shreveport area in a meeting with *The News-Star's* edito-

rial board last week. Louisiana has seven congressional districts, but political experts anticipate the state will lose a seat because of population loss relative to other states since the 2000 census.

If the current 5th District is expanded, 5th District U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, would be at a distinct electoral disadvantage if he had 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.

For his part, Kostelka said that scenario would be disastrous for northeast Louisiana.

"I think it is good government when you want to have a congressional district where you have some voice in the election of that congressman," he said.

"It's the same thing with the Voting Rights Act, that's why you've got that, so that the people have a meaningful vote in who they elect." Kostelka also defended himself from criticism that he is not doing what's best for the

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state.

"If I'm to be blamed for trying to keep my congressional district so be it," he said.

"I want to keep it for northeast Louisiana. That's not taking it away from anybody else, that's just saying we need our own representative for this part of the state. It's already diluted by the fact that we have to go all the way to Plaquemines Parish."

Stonecipher said Kostelka's relationship with Alexander "may be driving" Kostelka's insistence on preserving the district and he said any interpretation by south Louisiana legislators that Kostelka is somehow playing favorites could come back to bite north Louisiana.

"Political guns will be trained on north Louisiana," Stonecipher said.

"It just creates bad will. I and others believe that the

real hardball stuff that's going to have to go on is between north Louisiana and south-east Louisiana."

Members of both legislative committees tasked with reapportionment began learning about the reapportionment process in meetings in Alexandria earlier this month. House and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, initially closed the meetings to the public and the press. But following a hailstorm of criticism from the media and good government groups, the meetings were opened.

Gallot has said he will schedule regional public meetings in nine cities to gather input from Louisiana residents and emphasize the importance of participating in the census.

Louisiana is likely to receive its first information on the results of the census, which will begin April 1, in early 2011.