

More people move to La.

But congressional seat likely a goner

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By Robert Travis Scott

Capital bureau

BATON ROUGE -- A new estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau says Louisiana's population continues to increase since the setback of Hurricane Katrina, thanks in part to a trend of more people moving into the state than moving out.

While the growth is positive, it does not appear to be robust enough to prevent Louisiana from losing a congressional seat once the 2010 census determines the nation's next official demographic landscape.

"Any uptick is a great thing, certainly," said Bill Blair, a demographer for the Louisiana Legislature. But the new 2009 estimate "is no replacement for the true census calculations" of 2010, he said.

Louisiana's population was 4,492,076 as of July, an increase of 40,563 from the year before, according to the latest annual estimate released Wednesday. The estimate is about 5,600 fewer people than the state's historical peak in 2005, which was calculated just before a massive migration from flooded New Orleans.

The Census Bureau will release new population estimates for the parishes in March. Before Katrina, the state had been battling a debilitating trend of out-migration. The latest estimate marks the third year in a row the state has registered a net in-migration, much of that reversal from people returning to Louisiana after being displaced by Katrina.

Between July 2008 and July 2009, 18,123 more people moved into the state than moved out, according to the census estimate. That included a net gain of 14,647 from within the United States and a net of 3,476 from foreign countries.

Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration attributed the in-migration to Louisiana's relatively strong economy compared to other states. For example, although Louisiana is suffering from the recession, it has lower unemployment than the national and southern averages. "As long as Louisiana's economy continues to outperform the South and the U.S. overall, we are likely to see these positive population migration trends continue," said Jindal's economic development secretary, Stephen Moret.

U.S. congressional seats are allotted according to population counts taken every 10 years, the latest being 2000. The 2009 figures are the last set of population estimates that will be published before the official 2010 Census that will be released next December.

Louisiana is likely to drop from its current seven to six congressional seats because most other states have gained larger proportions of population since the 2000 Census. Blair said the new 2009 estimates do not appear to alter that expectation.

Based on the new data, the state Legislature will redraw congressional and state legislative political districts in 2011.

The U.S. population topped 307 million with a one-year increase of less than 1 percent, according to the 2009 estimate. Texas gained more people -- 478,000 -- than any other state during the 12-month period.

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