

## Redistricting a heavy plate

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One of the most important tasks facing the Louisiana Legislature this spring is not the budget, although balancing it will be a major challenge.

The politically difficult, but constitutionally mandated, redrawing of representation districts at the federal and state level is required every 10 years after the U.S. Census results are in.

This year, because of population losses, slower population growth than other states and population shifts, the way the districts are redrawn could negatively impact northeastern Louisiana's voice in Congress and in the Louisiana Legislature.

Even though you may be registered to vote, you don't get much of a say in this process. The redrawn districts aren't sent to the voters for approval.

But you have a voice, and you will have the opportunity to make your interests known this week. A public meeting is scheduled at 10 a.m. Tuesday in the Monroe Civic Center's Bayou Room with the two chairmen of the legislative committees who will craft the boundaries.

State Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, chairman of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee, and state Sen. Bob Kostelka, R-Monroe, chairman of the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee, will lead the session.

In an effort to allow maximum participation in the process, meetings are being streamed live over the Internet and archived at the Louisiana House website. Comments and questions can be submitted via Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and other social media sites. Information about the social media sites is available at the Louisiana House website, [house.louisiana.gov](http://house.louisiana.gov).

"Public input is absolutely vital as far as I'm concerned," Gallot said. "I'm walking into all of the public meetings with an open mind, and only after I've heard from everyone during the town hall meetings will we be armed with enough information to move forward."

Gallot and Kostelka have already hosted six of the nine public meetings. The final three meetings are in Monroe, Alexandria and Shreveport.

One of the biggest issues will be how to draw Louisiana's new congressional districts, which will be reduced from seven to six because of slow population growth.

"We've had more feedback on that than anything else," Gallot said. "But there's also more local feedback from people whose neighborhoods are split and they want them put back together."

You have an opportunity to participate in the process that will be very important to our region for the next 10 years. Please use it.