

Central Louisiana sounds off about how to redraw political districts

Written by

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Members of state House and Senate Governmental Affairs committees heard the wishes and wants from Alexandria-area residents who weighed in Tuesday on what they'd like to see happen when the Legislature starts redrawing some of Louisiana's political boundaries later this month.

Ten state representatives and five senators who sit on the committees were in Alexandria Convention Hall for the last of a series of meetings around the state to gauge what voters want to come out of the special legislative session on redistricting that starts March 20 and ends by April 13.

Out of the House and Senate committees, new political districts will emerge for the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Public Service Commission, state appellate courts and the Supreme Court, congressional districts, and House and Senate districts.

The Legislature, which will vote on the

plans, will try to finish the task before state elections are held in the fall.

"We are stuck in the 4th (Congressional) District," said Gerald Hamilton, the mayor of Colfax in Grant Parish. Grant Parish is on the outskirts of the 4th Congressional District. Hamilton said he and others in Grant Parish mostly work and spend their money in Rapides Parish, which is part of the 5th Congressional District.

Thomas Smith, also of Grant Parish, said he's never seen or talked to the congressman who represents the 4th District, John Fleming, a Republican from Shreveport.

Smith also said he wants to see congressional districts run east-west. Currently, the 4th and 5th Districts run vertically, splitting the state as they run from North Louisiana southward. Because of population lags, both the 4th and 5th Districts, if they stay running north and south, would have to reach farther south to pick up people.

The 5th District congressman is Rodney Alexander, a Republican from Quitman.

Deborah Randolph, chairman of the board of the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce, asked that when Alexandria is placed in one of the six congressional districts, it shares the district with a city that has much in common with the state's central city.

Douglas Davis of Alexandria said he would like to see Shreveport and Monroe share a congressional district.

"A district with Shreveport and Monroe would be appropriate, a district with Shreveport and Lake Charles would not," Douglas said.

Redistricting is a process states across the country must go through every 10 years after the U.S. Census Bureau conducts population counts. In 2010, Louisiana didn't keep up with the rest of the country in population gains and will lose a congressional seat, going from seven to six in 2012.

State Senate and House seats will be redrawn locally also, with minority districts dotting areas throughout Louisiana.

Sibal Holt of Alexandria said she wants to see race demographics in districts more even. There is a dissolution of voices, she said, when districts are drawn to be overly white or overly black.

"It has not been beneficial" to whites or blacks when the racial makeup is 90 percent to 10 percent either way, Holt said.

---On the Web: For information on redistricting, go to www.legis.state.la.us.