

Saving our district

September 21, 2010

It's what we've feared for so long.

Early Census reports indicate that northeastern Louisiana and New Orleans have lost enough population that one or the other will lose a congressional representative, as the state's population numbers call for Louisiana to lose one of seven current seats.

Louisiana is one of a small number of states, including Mississippi, that will receive census data from this year's decennial count early next year from the U.S. Census Bureau, a few months before other states, because Louisiana must redraw not only U.S. Congressional Districts, but also state House, Senate and other legislative districts before qualifying begins next fall.

Complicating matters for the members of Louisiana's House and Senate Governmental Affairs Committees — who are charged with redrawing the state's electoral map — is the fact that Louisiana is also one of seven states that, as part of the Voting Rights Act, must get preclearance for its new district map from the U.S. Department of Justice.

It won't be a pretty sight. Redistricting is the most politically charged activity any elected official can expect to engage in. And when a state is carving up six House districts instead of seven, you can expect to see some political hardball and behind-the-scenes deals.

Northeastern Louisiana is in good position to fight, with state Sen. Bob Kostelka and state Rep. Rick Gallot chairing legislative committees that will oversee redistricting.

Last year, Kostelka pledged to do everything in his power to preserve a northeastern Louisiana congressional district that does not include the northwestern Louisiana metro area. That would preserve our region's electoral voice.

Old-timers recall when a "northern Louisiana" congressional district wasn't ideal for this region. Were the current 5th Congressional District to be expanded to include the northwestern Louisiana metro area, 5th District U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander,

R-Quitman, would be at a distinct disadvantage because he would likely be forced 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.

Our legislators need to know we're depending on them as they embark on the redistricting project, so as you see them at events this fall, be sure to let them know your feelings about redistricting. They need to know we support them and we want them to stand firm in their positions of leadership.

It won't be easy. But they can save northeastern Louisiana's congressional seat, and we're counting on our delegation to do just that.

The editorials in this column represent the opinions of The News-Star's editorial board, composed of President and Publisher David B. Petty, Executive Editor Kathy Spurlock, Managing Editor Ken Stickney and community representatives Wiley Hilburn, Whitney Martin and Roderick Worthy.

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