

Coastal district has advocates

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Redistricting poses many questions

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- Advocate Capitol News Bureau
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Some south Louisiana legislators are pushing for creation of a coastal district when the Legislature redraws congressional lines this spring, a key redistricting player said Monday.

“It’s an idea worth looking into,” said state House and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Rick Gallot, whose panel, along with a similar Senate committee, leads remap efforts.

Many ideas are floating around as the Louisiana Legislature prepares to tackle redistricting with one less congressional seat because of population losses in the last decade, Gallot, D-Ruston, told the Press

Club of Baton Rouge.

Louisiana expects to lose a congressional district — dropping to six overall — when some statewide census numbers are released Tuesday.

Gallot said the coastal areas have commonalities that should be considered as new congressional district lines are drawn, including exposure to hurricanes, the BP oil disaster and coastal erosion.

New congressional lines will be on an eight-item, redistricting agenda when the Legislature meets March 20 to April 13 in a special session lawmakers have called.

The legislatively called session is a first since 1954, when lawmakers got the constitutional authority to do so, House Clerk Butch Speer said. Special sessions are traditionally called by governors.

“It’s not a slight at anybody. It’s a job for the Legislature to do. It’s appropriate for us to call ourselves in to do this,” Gallot said, referring to redistricting.

Later in the day, Gov. Bobby Jindal said he is more than happy for legislators to call themselves into session. He said he talked to legislative leaders about the dates for the session.

As of Monday, 96 out of 105 state representatives and more than 30 of the 39 senators had signed the petition calling themselves into session, according to legislative officials.

According to the petition, the session agenda includes redrawing congressional district lines as well as those for the Louisiana House, Senate, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, Public Service Commission, Supreme Court and Courts of Appeals. The new lines are based on population changes in the last decade to assure equal representation.

Another agenda item would permit myriads of state laws applicable to areas with certain population levels to be adjusted based on 2010 census data.

Gallot told the Press Club of Baton Rouge that congressional redistricting will be one of the thornier topics with two sitting congressmen being thrown into the same district as lines are redrawn.

One majority black district must legally be preserved, Gallot said. With population losses in the New Orleans area, the 2nd congressional district could change considerably, he said.

Gallot said something similar to today’s majority black PSC district that runs from New Orleans to north Baton Rouge, including communities near the Mississippi River, “certainly is a reasonable footprint to look at.”

Gallot said two north Louisiana-based congressional districts could undergo substantial changes.

The Shreveport-based 4th Congressional District would have to extend to the Gulf of Mexico to pick up needed population, Gallot said. And, he said, the Monroe-based 5th District would expand to Plaquemines Parish instead of just to outside Baton Rouge.

“At that point, it’s no longer a Monroe or Shreveport seat,” Gallot said.

“The question becomes — does New Roads and Oak Grove have that much in common that there’s

community of interest or do Monroe and Shreveport have more in common?" Gallot asked.

Questions like that are the reason why it is so important for people to give their opinions in public hearings that will be held in nine cities around the state Feb. 17 to March 1, he said.

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