

March 25th marked the end of the first week of the special legislative session on redistricting. The two articles below do a good job capturing the gist of the major issue of the week: new congressional district lines. Louisiana loses a congressional district this session. There were a handful of contentious discussions related to redrawing legislative district lines this week (especially with CenLA-area Senate and Representative Districts), but those plans will also continue to be hammered out over the next two-and-a-half weeks.

Blake Cooper
Roy O. Martin

House speaker: Idea of I-20 congressional district on life support after Jindal comments New Orleans Times-Picayune Friday, March 25, 2011 Bill Barrow The idea of an east-west congressional district along Interstate 20 appears to be losing steam, House Speaker Jim Tucker said today, citing Gov. Bobby Jindal's support for maintaining two north-south districts extending well into south Louisiana from the Arkansas line.

Jindal's chief of staff has confirmed throughout the first week of the special session on redistricting that the Republican governor has sided with a majority of the congressional delegation, including Reps. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, and John Fleming, R-Minden, who represent the existing 4th and 5th districts.

If lawmakers bow to the governor's wishes -- a frequent posture for the Legislature -- it would shift the focus to south Louisiana lines as lawmakers decide how to redraw seven congressional districts into six.

"I think that's the political reality," Tucker said.

There has been a growing push in the House, headlined by House redistricting Chairman Rick Gallot, a Democrat, to shift to an east-west orientation for north Louisiana districts. Gallot's proposal would include Shreveport and much of Monroe - with the exception of majority white precincts in Ouachita Parish - in a district that would be 42 percent African-American. Such a design could make the district competitive for Democratic candidates, a prospect that a Republican governor almost certainly would want to avoid on his watch.

Still other north Louisiana lawmakers proposed a simpler east-west district roughly following the Interstate 20 corridor. That idea would be less about creating another competitive district and more about satisfying local leaders in Shreveport and Monroe who say they share common interests and want to share a Congressional district.

Alexander and Fleming and Jindal aides argue that - population shifts to south Louisiana notwithstanding - a new map should maintain the historical representation pattern. Fleming also has added the argument that his district includes Fort Polk and Barksdale Air Force base, while Alexander's district covers the state's agricultural centers.

House speaker says an I-20 district is unlikely Baton Rouge Business Report March 25, 2011 Staff report Gov. Bobby Jindal's preference to maintain two vertical districts based in north Louisiana with separate seats for Monroe and Shreveport likely dooms an effort to create a district along Interstate 20 that includes both cities. That's according to House Speaker Jim Tucker, talking today about the congressional redistricting plans at play in the special session. Louisiana's delegation is shrinking from seven U.S. House members to six because of the state's anemic population growth. Lawmakers haven't decided how to redraw the congressional map. One of the most significant disputes involves whether Monroe and Shreveport should continue to be contained in separate districts that run from the Arkansas state line down into southern Louisiana. Jindal supports the large, vertical districts, so Tucker says that's dampened attempts to create the horizontal, I-20 district.