A Fourth Judge Approved For The 15th District

It’s too early yet to assess the current legislative session. Bills are just now being acted upon, some good, some bad, but it wouldn’t be fair to our senators and representatives at this point to reach a judgment as to overall performance.

One bill that sailed through both houses and that we particularly in Southwest Louisiana are enthusiastic about, however, is that creating a fourth judgeship for the 15th Judicial District.

Crowded court dockets have plagued Lafayette, Acadia and Vermilion parishes for years. The last available report by the Judicial Council of the Supreme Court of Louisiana was for 1964. That report showed that 7,134 cases had been filed, both criminal and civil, in the district. Lafayette alone had 4,055 of these cases. Acadia had 1,616 and Vermilion, 1,463. With our increase in population, the case load since then has become much heavier. Consequently, some cases have had to be shoved back six months at a time. Judges are pushed to the maximum of their capacity.

Then, too, there are more jury cases. These tie up the courts because it takes longer to pick a jury and hear a case than a single hearing before a judge. In addition, there are juvenile problems, adult problems, tutorships, adoptions, interdictions - a host of duties confronting a harassed judge, already beleaguered with so many cases that sometimes as many as four or six must be fixed in one day. If some of the cases are compromised, that helps. Otherwise, a date must be refixed—and the backlog keeps getting heavier.

The public is not entirely aware that a judge’s duties do not begin and end in the court room. Paperwork in his office occupies a great portion of his time. The hours are long and, more important, the cases of the people involved must wait interminably.

So the Senate bill creating an additional office of district judge for three districts, including the Fifteenth, is a welcome one. The cost for paying the judge and the attendant court reporter will be borne by the three parishes: 70 per cent by Lafayette (which has the largest burden of litigation), and 15 per cent each by Vermilion and Acadia parishes.

The new courthouse is being built so that two or more additional courtrooms may be added if necessary. As our parish grows, this may become necessary. Meanwhile, the district judges have been doing a most commendable job even under the cramped and heavy case load conditions they have been working under.

We hope that the addition of a fourth judge will alleviate these conditions because, in the final analysis, it is the people who have the most to gain by the smooth, efficient administration of justice.