OVER REMAP

Black Legislators Threaten Suit

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — The close-knit Louisiana Senate, expecting to agree on a reapportionment plan with little or no blood-letting, now is under the gun from blacks.

The special committee drafting a plan for the full Senate was expected to finish its work Wednesday but delayed the process a week after two black legislators threatened to sue if the Legislature doesn't create a new predominantly-black district in East Baton Rouge Parish.

To make matters more difficult, the plan of the blacks would make a predominantly black district out of the one represented by Sen. Tommy Hudson of Baton Rouge — chairman of the remap panel. The present draft gives the parish three and one-half districts.

The area now is represented by three senators — Hudson of the 15th, Mike Cross of the 14th and Ken Osterberger of the 16th.

The draft would link portions of Livingston and Tangipahoa parishes to a portion of East Baton Rouge to create a fourth area district.

Reps. Joe Delpit and Richard Turnley of Baton Rouge said the draft dilutes black voting strength.

True, said Turnley, District 14 gives blacks more representation than they have now but the plan takes blacks from Hudson's District 15, "thus giving us a net loss of four to five percent. Thanks, but no thanks."

Cross, recently elected to District 14, also didn't like the way Hudson's panel drew the plan.

Calling himself "the new kid on the block," Cross said he was not being fairly treated under the committee plan, but he said it with a smile.

The draft increases the black population in 14 but takes from Cross his strong support base, Ward 2, which is predominantly white.

"I haven't even had a chance to represent my people yet and now I won't have them to represent," he told reporters earlier.

He pointed out that his district at this time is just 2,000 over the perfect senatorial district population of 107,794 while Hudson's district is 20,000 short and Osterberger's district is about 60,000 over.

"Yet, my district, which is about what it should be, is the one most drastically changed," he said, grinning at Hudson.

"It's every man for himself," Hudson shot back jokingly.

Delpit and Turnley said they had their own plan which would, in effect, make Hudson's district a predominantly black one.

"We represent one-third of the population," said Turnley. "The area has like interests, like purpose, the whole bit. We have a plan that adheres to the principles set forth by the courts."

Delpit said they would have no choice but to go to court to challenge any reapportionment plan that "dilutes black voting strength the way yours does."

Glen Koepp, the committee's staff counsel, said the present plan was drawn to avoid diluting black strength.

"We were looking at present districts and..." (Continued on Page 6, Col. 1)

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not trying to move district lines more than we have to," he said.

Hudson said the suggestions of the black lawmakers will be taken into consideration and will be studied by the staff, which will report back next week to the 12-member committee.

"We're running out of time," Sen. Leonard Chabert of Houma said at one point. "At the rate we're going, we'll be here until midnight on Nov. 1."

The Legislature convenes in special session Nov. 2 to consider reapportionment plans for the lawmakers, for congressional districts and for the public service commission.

"We haven't even approved a PSC plan yet," Chabert complained.

Most senators felt in the early going of the drafting that they wouldn't have any trouble drafting an acceptable plan for the upper chamber.

Delpit and Turnley may have changed all that, several senators said later.