Edwards finds no problem with EBR remap plan

By MARSHA SHULER
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Gov. Edwin Edwards said Thursday he does not believe carving up East Baton Rouge Parish and other major metropolitan areas into multiple congressional districts is that bad.

“As a former member of Congress, I'm going to make a flat out statement that the mayor of Baton Rouge disagrees with... but you are better off with parts of three congressmen than having one congressman,” Edwards said.

“I recognize that few people agree with that, but I'm telling you as a governor, a member of the congressional delegation at one time, that it is in the city's interest. I can assure them it is not a reason to be concerned.”

A Senate panel approved a congressional redistricting plan Wednesday that carves East Baton Rouge up into three congressional districts.

One area would be part of a new majority black district that reaches into northeast Louisiana; another would be part of a district that reaches up into Caddo Parish and yet another would dip down as part of a district that goes to the shores of Lake Ponchartrain.

Baton Rouge Mayor Tom Ed McHugh and the Metro Council, as well as the councils in neighboring towns, have gone on record opposing the split.

East Baton Rouge is in two congressional districts. The majority is in the 6th District and a smaller portion - mainly in the Scotlandville area - is in the 8th District.

Edwards said he would not let the splitting up of East Baton Rouge into three different congressional districts sway him one way or the other in his support or objection to any plan.

“Given the charge that we have to meet the one-man, one-vote rule, to reduce from eight to seven the number of districts and to create another black majority district, no plan coming out of the Legislature that meets that criteria will look good and I'm certain there will be some distortion of traditional congressional lines,” Edwards said.

“I would hope that that is not the end result, but I would not allow that to be a condition for me to veto the bill,” he said.

Edwards had no comforting words for East Baton Rouge and other localities upset with the plan approved by the Senate committee.

“Everybody is being treated unfairly,” Edwards said.

“There will not be a pretty picture coming out of any congressional redistricting plan given the constraints under which we have to operate,” Edwards said.

“It is going to be necessary to have L-shaped, circle-shaped, moon-shaped, pretzel-shaped and Edwards letter-shaped districts in order to create districts that comply” with federal requirements.

Edwards also said he does not consider the plan “partisan,” even though it clearly favors Democratic over Republican incumbents.

The plan would not be kind to Republican congressmen - it would put Republicans Richard Baker of Baton Rouge and Bob Livingston of New Orleans in the same district, and Republicans Jim McCrery of Shreveport and Clyde Holloway of Forest Hill in another.

“That is not a partisan plan. That is an acceptable plan based upon the three criteria which we have to address,” Edwards said.