Group protests Senate redistricting plan

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LAFAYETTE — A group of protesters representing a variety of views displayed their discontent here Friday with a state Senate reapportionment plan, advanced by state Sen. Armand Brinkhaus and aimed at carving out a black district for the Acadiana area.

State Rep. David Duke, driving to campaign stops in northern Louisiana, stopped to support the demonstration. Many of the protesters said they oppose creating a district based on racial makeup. They also voiced strong opposition to federal scrutiny of the state reapportionment process.

State Sen. Allen Bares said he favors a black district, but not in the disruptive form that awaits Gov. Roemer's consideration.

"As soon as he gets it, he's expected to veto it," Bares said.

Roemer said Friday that he expects to veto the bill Monday. And a special session is expected to be called in approximately two weeks to redraw a redistricting plan, Bares said.

A reapportionment plan has been drawn up by state representatives, but the U.S. Justice Department is expected to reject that proposal, Bares said.

Bares was joined Friday by state Reps. Don Higginbotham of Broussard and Armand Castille of Sunset.

Castille is running against Armand Brinkhaus this fall. Those opposing the reapportionment plan contend it was drawn to protect Brinkhaus while also creating a black district. Opponents of the plan, which also creates a black district in Monroe, say it causes illogical districts to be created throughout southern Louisiana, all the way to Calcasieu Parish and gerrymandering for the black district.

Bares' opponent in the race for Senate, Republican Carl Trischler of Lafayette, said he opposes creation of a district based on race.

He said the Voting Rights Act forbids the use of race as a criteria.

It seems to me also that this is segregation," Trischler said.

A black district would concentrate and distill minorities into one constituency, actually diluting their voting strength, he said.

It's the Justice Department's involvement in the reapportionment process that drew many of the protesters.

Most carried signs, and some read "Who elected the Justice Department?", "Stop the Second Reconstruction," and "Would You Hire (the Justice Department) as Your Butcher?"

One dissenter carried an inverted U.S. flag.

Babs Wilson of Baton Rouge wore a rebel flag on her hat. She said the confederate banner is symbolic of Louisiana's strained relationship with the federal government.

"We feel like we've never been let back in the Union," she said, calling the federal intervention in the reapportionment process part of "the second reconstruction."

Scott Allen of New Orleans carried a rebel flag, which he held behind an unaware Bares while the senator was being interviewed on videotape by a TV news crew.

Later, when Duke was being interviewed on camera, Allen kept the flag furled.

"There are reasons," Allen said without elaborating when asked why he wasn't displaying the flag for Duke's interview.

Duke said he was invited to the protest by the demonstrators.

He said he is prepared to file suit against the Justice Department, challenging the federal government's role in reapportionment. Duke said the case would be filed in federal court by Lafayette attorney J. Minos Simon and by New Orleans attorney James McPherson who helped run Duke's unsuccessful U.S. Senate campaign last year.

Duke said the lawsuit probably would challenge the constitutionality of the entire Voting Rights Act, and the argument for that challenge would be considered more favorably than ever upon reaching the conservative U.S. Supreme Court.

Duke said the gerrymandered black district drawn up in Brinkhaus' plan "looks like a crawfish that's beenucked and pinched."

Duke said he's not opposed to a black district "if it's natural," but districts should be "compact and contiguous."

While Duke was visiting with the demonstrators, Lafayette attorney Max Jordan showed the representative his designs for bumper stickers and T-shirts in his own race against Bares.

"I believe every citizen should have adequate representation," he said.

Jordan said the state should come up with its own reapportionment process that would remove the issue from politics.