Louisiana to Gain, Lose House Seat?

Louisiana grew by almost a third of a million people during the past decade — or 305,375 by preliminary Census Bureau counts — to 3.56 million. That's an average growth for the state's eight congressional districts of 38,172 folks. So how much closer are we to claiming a ninth congressman?

Don't look now, Louisiana, but we're farther away. In fact we may lose a seat in the United States House of Representatives, unless the state's growth in the 1970s exceeds or at least matches the nation's as a whole.

Here's why.

In 1960 the census put Louisiana at 3,257,022. The national yardstick for measuring congressional districts (435 seats into the U.S. population of 179.3 million) was roundly 410,000. So this state was entitled to 7.94 congressmen. That's eight.

In 1970 the criterion for claiming congressional representation may reach 471,000 persons per district — if the estimated 205.5 million national nose count proves true.

Notice, then, that the congressional district measuring rod may lengthen from 410,000 to 471,000 — more than a 60,000 increase — and Louisiana's average growth per district has been less than two-thirds that figure. Some districts, of course, lost heavily and some gained in varying degrees.

Thus, while Louisiana will have recorded a respectable 91/2 per cent growth in the '60s, the national growth will have averaged almost 15 per cent.

Remember, however, that the Pelican State started the last decade with claim to 7.94 congressional seats. Assuming again the national population estimate is reached, this state will be in great jeopardy of losing a House seat for its growth continues to lag behind the national rate even by just a little. For, with the new arithmetic, the 1970 census results will reduce the Louisiana district claim to 7.56 — perilously close to demanding a seven-man House delegation.

Some sympathetic or patronizing words have gone out to neighboring Mississippi, which lost 16,461 residents by preliminary count reports. With its 2.16 million population, the Magnolia State was said to be in danger of losing one of its five congressional seats. But if our mathematics is correct, the Pelican State should worry more.

For while Mississippi began the 1960s with a 5.31 claim on House seats, its demand has dropped to 4.59, which bodes no good for retaining that fifth seat — barring a dramatic reversal in population trends.

Louisiana, on the other hand, began the last decade with a claim on 7.94 congressional seats, which has since been lowered to 7.56.

Leaders and residents of both states had better look to the Deep South growth prospects — unless, ecologically speaking, we're to be commended for our restrained growth.