Lafayette’s Reapportionment Case is Eyed

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Baton Rouge (UPI) - This week the fight between rural and urban forces over reapportionment flared on two extreme fronts in Louisiana.

At Baton Rouge a former state Senator minced no words in saying he was unhappy with the work of the Legislative Reapportionment Committee.

If the committee has its way, the Louisiana House and probably the Senate too won't be reapportioned until the 1964 general elections have come and gone.

But J.D. Deblieux served notice he has no intentions of waiting that long. The Baton Rouge attorney says he will file suit in federal court before next spring to force the Louisiana House to reapportion itself in time for the 1963 elections.

Southwest of the state capital in Lafayette Parish, country and city wards clashed headon in a small, but tactically important reapportionment battle.

Rural Wards Favored

Lafayette attorney J. Minos Simon went into federal court, charging the makeup of the Lafayette parish police jury was all in favor of the rural wards whose jurors outmanned—and outvoted—their colleagues from the big city.

This happened, Simon complained, despite the fact 65 per cent of the parish population lives in one ward—Ward 3, which includes the growing city of Lafayette.

Simon said the setup violated his Civil Rights because it deprived him and other people in Ward 3 of a proper voice in the jury business.

Deblieux's suit will be aimed at forcing the House to reapportion itself on a population basis—as the state constitution says it should do every 10 years after a federal census. The legislature has chosen to largely ignore this mandate.

After months of work, the seven-man reapportionment committee, headed by Rep. Warren Simon of Vermillion Parish, reached final agreement Friday on how to realign the 106-seat House and the 39-seat Senate.

But the plans won't be made public until next month.

Face Rocky Road

And even then they face a rocky road before final adoption. Both must receive legislative approval. One, the House plan and probably the Senate measure too, then will be thrust at the voters to be adopted as constitutional amendments.

This is what pushed Deblieux into announcing he will file his suit before next spring. Constitutional amendments can only be submitted to the voters at general elections.

The next date for a general election is in March, 1964, when Louisiana selects a new governor plus Senators and Representatives.

If constitutional approval is required for both plans, it will stave off any changes in legislative seats until 1968 probably, unless a federal court takes quick action.

Simon said the House plan calls for a “slight increase” in membership but the Senate proposal, Simon said, would not change the size of the upper chamber.

Deblieux has said he will run for the additional House seat this area would pick up through reapportionment.

Will Ask Reshuffle

He said he will ask the federal court to order the House to reschedule its district.

The struggle at Lafayette is unique for two reasons.

One, the suit is apparently the first reapportionment litigation to reach the federal courts in Louisi