Treen Defends Congressional Remap Plan

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — "I have to reject the notion that whites cannot represent blacks and do it well and objectively — and vice versa," Gov. Dave Treen said, defending Louisiana's 1981 congressional reapportionment.

Treen told a three-judge federal panel Thursday it would be racism — and probably unconstitutional — to draw the boundaries of the districts solely to create one where black voters outnumber whites. The special court has been asked to order the state to create such a district.

The four-day hearing closed Thursday night. It will be about two months before final briefs are filed. There was no indication when, after that, the panel will rule.

Both Treen and Rep. Robert Livingston, R-La., told the court that political push-pull determined how the eight congressional district boundaries were redrawn in 1981, not race. Asked if anyone ever urged him to block a plan which would have created a New Orleans district where black voters would outnumber whites, Treen replied:

"I think there may have been some who talked in terms of making a district more liberal or more conservative, but no, I don't remember anybody saying anything like that to me."

On cross examination, Treen said he feels that deliberately drawing voting districts to promote the election of blacks could hurt race relations by leading to a polarization of the races and more bloc voting.

Livingston said no man could have been more sensitive to the needs of black voters in his 1st District than he has been — or more successful in getting grants and other benefits for black projects.

Blacks contend the Legislature's reapportionment of the congressional districts was unconstitutional because it diluted black voting power, putting half of New Orleans in the 1st District and half in the 2nd District.

The compromise plan finally approved came after Treen threatened to veto a plan which already had legislative approval. Among other things, he said he didn't like the 'radical changes' it made in the 1st District.

However, Treen testified he felt that persuasive lobbying by congressmen who preferred the compromise plan caused the legislators to back up, not his threat to veto.

A reapportionment plan in the Deep South must pass inspection by the Department of Justice, and this one did. However, Lani Guinier, who cross-examined Treen, said the approval came under suspicious circumstances and should not be a factor for the judges to ponder.

Treen, Louisiana's first Republican governor in 100 years, has close ties with the Reagan administration. Whether the plan was pre-cleared was not going to be an important factor in the deliberation, said Politz, and perhaps the questioning might get on to other subjects?