Treen says he'll sign congressional remap

By JOHN LaPLANTE
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Gov. Treen says he will sign into law new boundary lines that create Louisiana's first majority-black congressional district.

The maps approved by the Legislature Wednesday face legal review on at least two fronts before they can be used to elect Louisiana's representatives to Congress next fall.

But indications are that the plan will be accepted by federal authorities and black groups that opposed the old districts on grounds they were unfair to minorities.

U.S. Appeals Court Judge Henry Politz, head of a three-judge panel that declared the old districts a violation of the U.S. Voting Rights Act, was noncommittal on the chances of his panel approving the new plan. He said it will be some time before he sees it.

"We'll have to look at it very, very carefully," Politz said in a telephone interview from his office in Shreveport.

However, the plan achieves the goal that was implicit in his order — drawing boundary lines to create a district that gives blacks a chance at electing one of their own to Congress for the first time this century.

"I'm satisfied that the bill supports the court decision," said state Sen. William Jefferson, D-New Orleans, a black lawmaker who authored the redistricting bill.

The judges gave the Legislature until Jan. 31, 1984, to submit new maps. Politz said that, because the Legislature acted quickly, it may be possible to rule on the new plan earlier next month.

The redistricting bill, like all Louisiana election laws, also must be reviewed by the U.S. Justice Department for its fairness to minorities. However, Justice attorneys approved the previous plan even though it did not create a majority-black congressional district anywhere in the state.

"I know of no opposition to the plan, at least among civil rights advocates," said Bill Quigley, one of the attorneys representing six black citizens who sued the state claiming the old district lines diluted the voting power of minorities.

"We want to reserve judgment until our experts look at it," Quigley said, but "it sounds like the Legislature did a good job. I think they did it fairly."

The Senate voted 36-3 Wednesday to go along with minor changes made by the House in the bill, which had been passed by the Senate last week.

Treen said before the vote that he would sign the bill into law "if it stands like it is." After final legislative action Wednesday, Treen's press office confirmed that he will sign the measure.

The new maps would enhance the possibility of Louisiana electing its first black to Congress in modern history by setting up a 2nd Congressional District in New Orleans with a 58 percent black population.

"We waited 100 years for this," said black New Orleans Rep. Diana Bajoie.

(See REMAP, 12A)