



Mississippi House map expected for unveiling Wednesday

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 **The Associated Press** By



JACKSON, Mississippi - The Mississippi House could unveil its own redistricting plan on Wednesday, capping months of speculation about a new map that could shape lawmakers' political fortunes for the coming decade.

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Senate leaders say it could be a few days before a new Senate map is shown to the public because experts and attorneys are still reviewing that chamber's proposal.

The 122 state House districts and 52 Senate districts have to be redrawn after every census to account for population changes. Between 2000 and 2010, there was rapid growth in DeSoto County, just south of Memphis, Tenn., while the population fell in the economically struggling Delta. The capital city of Jackson lost population, while its surrounding suburbs grew.

The House redistricting chairman, Republican Rep. Bill Denny of Jackson, has called three meetings Wednesday, indicating that lawmakers will have maps to consider. House redistricting members meet at 9 a.m. The full redistricting committee, including House and Senate members, meets at 11 a.m. The House Elections Committee meets at 1 p.m.

Denny was not available for an interview Tuesday because he was meeting privately with attorneys to discuss the House map, his assistant said. However, several House members said Denny had spoken with them about the shape and demographic makeup of their districts.

Rep. David Myers, D-McComb, said his own district "looks pretty good," but, like most other lawmakers, he has not seen the entire House map. Myers, a member of the Legislative Black Caucus, said it's important to know how many majority-black districts are being drawn.

"Even if it's approved by a majority of members, it'll still end up in federal court," said Myers, whose current district includes parts of Pike and Walthall counties in the southwestern part of the state.

Rep. Lester "Bubba" Carpenter, R-Burnsville, represents a district that includes parts of Alcorn and Tishomingo counties in the northeastern corner of the state. He said Wednesday that his proposed new district would lose two split precincts, and he's happy with that change.

"It looks good for me," Carpenter said.

One white Democrat, Rep. Steve Holland of Plantersville, said he was told that his proposed new district has a black voting age population of more than 50 percent. Holland said he believes he could be re-elected in such a district, with support of black and white voters. His current district is entirely inside Lee County.

Legislators argued about redistricting for several weeks in 2011 before ending their session without approving new maps.

Because of Mississippi's history of racial discrimination, the redistricting plans must be approved by the U.S. Justice Department, which checks to ensure that the maps don't dilute minority voting strength.

Mississippi's population is 37 percent black. Its voting-age population is 35 percent black.

The House currently has 39 majority-black districts, or 32 percent of the 122 seats. A House redistricting plan that ultimately failed in 2011, which was drawn by a Democratic chairman, would have increased that to 44 seats, or 36 percent.

The Senate currently has 12 majority-black districts, or 24 percent of the 52 seats. A Senate plan the ultimately failed in 2011, drawn by a different Republican chairman, would have increased that to 15 seats, or 29 percent.

Republican Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves, who presides over the Senate, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that attorneys from the Butler Snow law firm and some private consultants are reviewing the House and Senate redistricting plans.

"I don't anticipate their being any problems as it relates to either the Voting Rights Act or potential judicial scrutiny," Reeves said of the Senate map. "We want to be sure that before we actually release the plan that our experts are comfortable with what the plan looks at."

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