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NEWS

GOP lawmakers pass Alabama congressional map; Democrats say it defies Supreme Court

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A conference committee of three representatives and three senators approves a proposed new congressional map for Alabama on Friday. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled the current map most likely violates the Voting Rights Act. (Mike Cason/mcason@al.com)

By **Mike Cason | mcason@al.com**

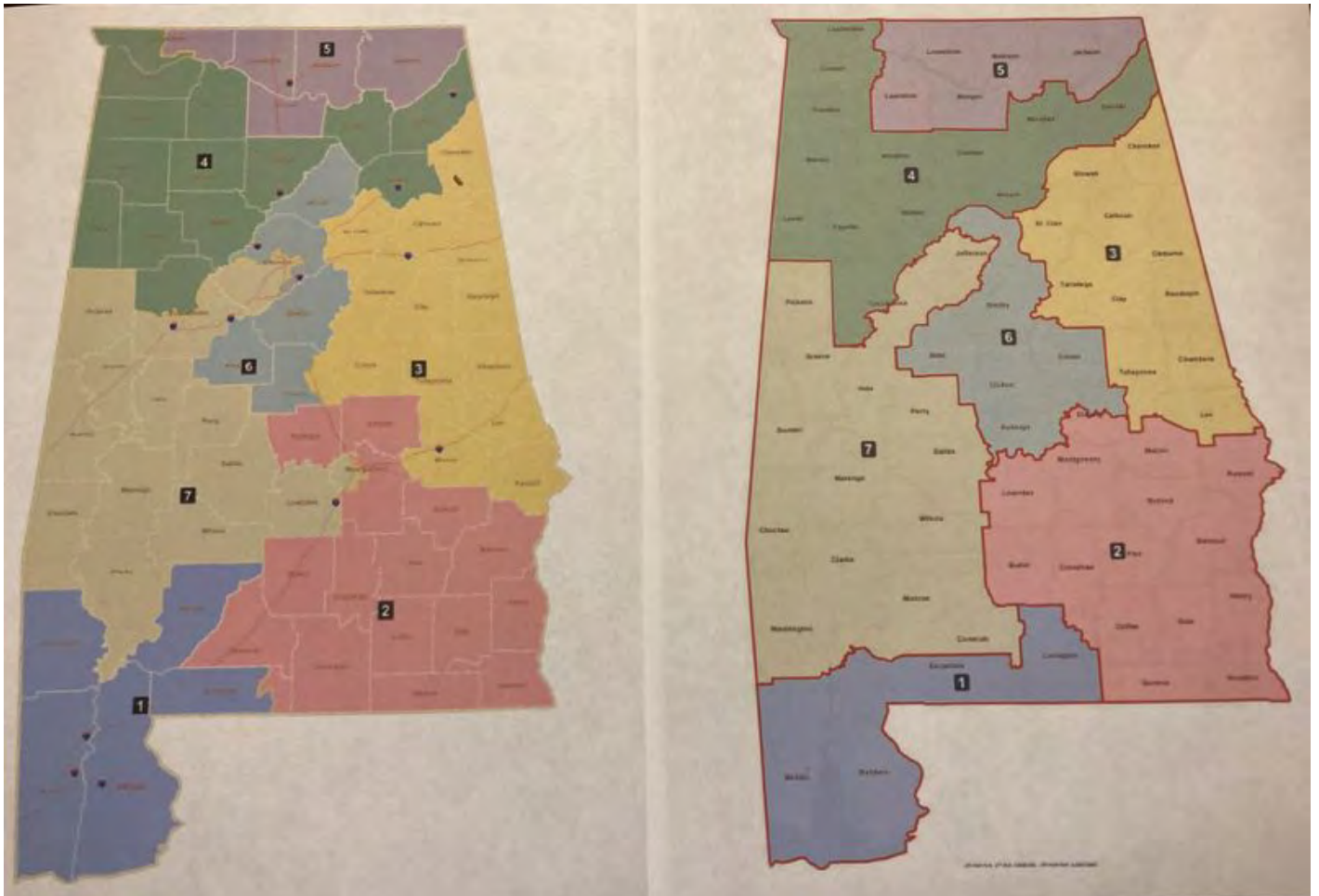
The Alabama Legislature passed a new congressional district map Friday, a compromise version approved by Republicans on a conference committee.

Like earlier versions of maps supported by the Republican majority in the State House, it does not add a second majority Black district.

Friday is the deadline set by a federal court for the Legislature to approve a new map.

The Senate approved the conference committee map by a vote of 24-6 Friday afternoon. The House later approved it by a vote of 75-28.

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Alabama's 2021 congressional map, left, and the new map passed by the Legislature on July 21, 2023. On the new map, District 7 remains the only majority Black district. In District 2, the Black voting age population was increased from 30% to 40%, which Republican lawmakers who passed the plan said they believe can fix what the U.S. Supreme Court said is a likely Voting Rights Act violation on the 2021 map. (Mike Cason/mcason@al.com)

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed a three-judge district court ruling that Alabama's current map likely violates the Voting Rights Act by diluting the Black vote.

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One-fourth of the state's residents are Black, but only one of the seven Congressional districts has a majority Black population. The district court said that to fix the violation, Alabama needed a second majority Black district "or something quite close to it," a district where Black voters would have an opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice.

The map approved by the conference committee Friday would leave District 7 as the lone majority Black district, barely, at 51% in Black voting age population, down from 56% on the current map. It would increase the Black voting age population in District 2, which covers southeast Alabama, from 30% to 40%.

Sen. Steve Livingston, R-Scottsboro, sponsor of the plan, said the intent is for District 2 to be the second "opportunity" district for Black voters.

Rep. Chris England, D-Tuscaloosa, a member of the conference committee, said the plan does not comply with the court's order.

"This is the quintessential definition of noncompliance and I believe it will be rejected," England said.

The three-judge district court tentatively scheduled an Aug. 14 hearing to consider challenges to the map.

The conference committee voted 4-2 in favor of the map. Voting for the map were the four Republicans on the panel -- Livingston, Sen. Clay Scofield of Guntersville, Rep. Chris Pringle of Mobile, and Rep. Chris Sells of Greenville.

Voting no were England and Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham.

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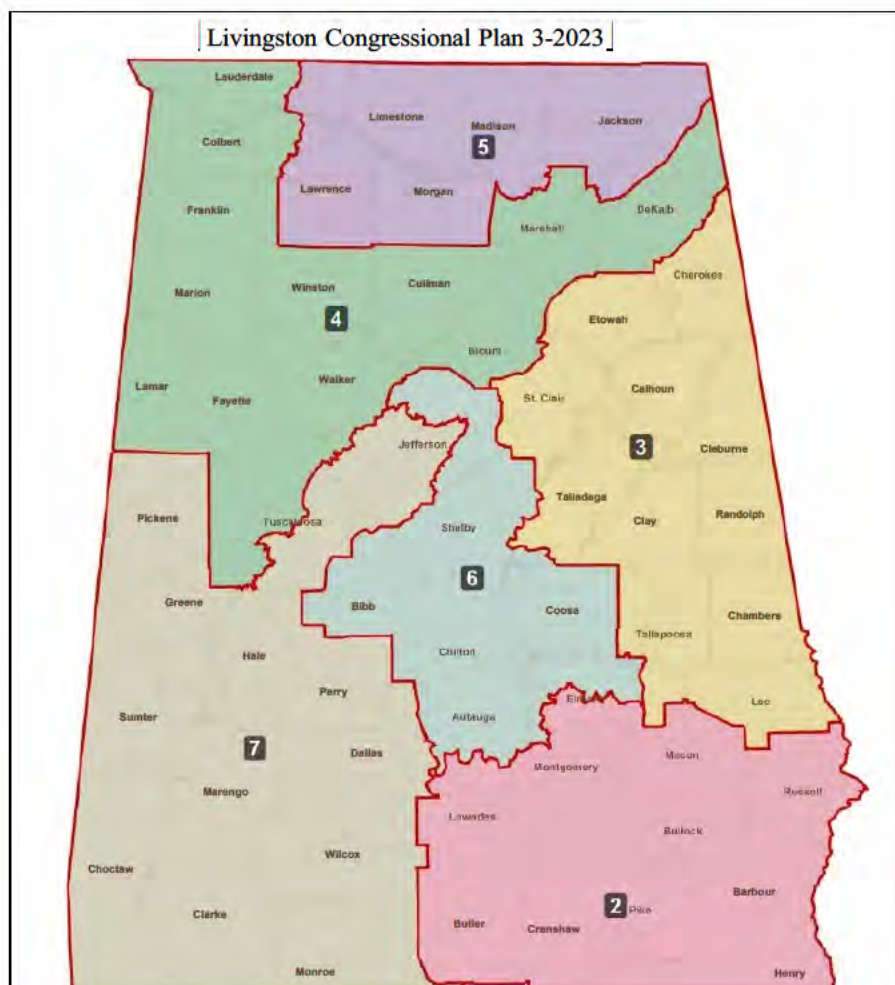
Later on Friday afternoon, before the Senate approved the conference committee map, Smitherman said lawmakers did not receive important information about the Republican-backed plans, including an analysis of recent election results that he said would have shown whether Black voters would have an opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice in the proposed District 2. Smitherman said it was not enough just to know the Black voting age population.

"I think the process on the other side was set up so that you could make sure an African American would not win it," Smitherman said. "I think it was intentionally set that way."

Rep. Barbara Boyd, D-Anniston, said the new District 2, with a 40% Black voting age population, does not match the district court guidance for a second majority Black district "or something quite close to it."

"The maps that we see aren't even close, much less quite close," Boyd said.

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