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Gov. Landry calls special session on redistricting as new legislature takes office

By [Sabrina Wilson](#)

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BATON ROUGE, La. (WVUE) - Republican Jeff Landry officially assumed the governor's office Monday (Jan. 8) at noon, and hours later issued his first call for a special legislative session. A new Louisiana legislature also was sworn in at the state capitol building and two New Orleans-area lawmakers gained more power.

The special session scheduled to start Jan. 15 will focus on redistricting. A federal court has ordered the state to redraw its Congressional boundaries, saying the current map dilutes black voting strength in the state.



On the other side of the capitol, Rep. Phillip Devillier (R-Eunice) was named House Speaker. And Rep. Matthew Willard (D-New Orleans) got a new leadership role.

"I'm the chair of the House Democratic Caucus, meaning I lead the caucus of 32 members to represent Democratic values in the state of Louisiana," Willard said.

Republicans hold a super-majority in both chambers of the legislature. But Democrats say they will continue to push for legislation aligned with their ideals.

"We're here to meet the challenge and we're going to make sure that our voices are heard and that our constituents are represented," Sen. Royce Duplessis (D-New Orleans) said.

In the Senate, Henry said some Democrats will chair committees.

"Yes, we're definitely going to have Democratic chairs, no doubt it," Henry said.

In a week, lawmakers return to the capitol to start a special session on reapportionment. Democrats have argued for two years that the state's population warrants a second majority-Black district.

"The math is clear," Willard said. "A third of six is two. And so we look forward to beginning that redistricting session and walking away with two majority-minority African-American congressional districts. When we talk about the Supreme Court map, the same is true."

Henry said he believes the legislature will get the job done.

"We've been working diligently on the congressional map," he said. "So, I'm confident that we'll get a map that suffices the judge's requirements as it relates to the Supreme Court. We have a lot of work to do there, because that's kind of coming in at the end."

Duplessis said it is time the legislature adheres to what the federal court demands.

"I don't think we really have a choice," Duplessis said. "We have to do what the judge has ordered us to do. We've been at this over two years now, so it's my hope that we use this opportunity and come in and do what the law has ordered us to do."

A special session on crime is expected to be called soon after the redistricting conclave.

Sen. Pat Connick (R-Marrero) says the state has to get tougher on criminals.

"We just got to prosecute the criminals," Connick said. "If you commit a crime, go after them, put you in jail. ... I think, in the past, it was some break away from that."

But some Democrats say the roots of crime cannot be ignored in new legislation.

"I hope that what comes from it is data-driven solutions that make our communities safer," Willard said. "And we're working on legislation. So, the House Democratic Caucus will have legislation proposed during that crime special session."

Duplessis said, "We cannot have a real conversation about crime if we're not talking about root causes such as economic opportunity, mental health, other issues that impact crime."

Rep. Stephanie Hilferty (R-Metairie/New Orleans) said education is one of her top priorities for the new legislature.

"One is early education, which I have fought for for a long time," she said. "I'm hopeful we can make some progress on the crime situation, specifically

