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NEWS

What's next in veto showdown between Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards and Legislature?



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Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards' veto of the new congressional map passed by the Legislature last month triggers a showdown between the Deep South's only Democratic governor and the Republican-dominated House and Senate.

Edwards vetoed the map late Wednesday because it doesn't add a second majority-Black district despite an increase in the state's Black population during the past decade.

The new six-district Congressional map kept a similar configuration to the existing one with a single majority-Black district based in New Orleans and part of Baton Rouge represented by Congressman Troy Carter of New Orleans.

“Today, after careful consideration, review, discussion with legislators, and consultation with voting rights experts, I have vetoed the proposed congressional map drawn by Louisiana’s Legislature because it does not include a second majority African American district, despite Black voters making up almost a third of Louisianans per the latest U.S. Census data,” Edwards said in a statement.

The governor said he doesn't believe the map meets Voting Rights Act requirements.

More: Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards vetoes congressional map without new Black district

Though Republican Slidell Sen. Sharon Hewitt's map (Senate Bill 5) passed by strong margins, it didn't clear either the House or Senate with the two-thirds vote needed to overturn a gubernatorial veto.

Hewitt said she is prepared for the showdown, which she reiterated on Twitter Thursday: "I am disappointed in the governor's decision to veto the congressional map and am confident that the map the Legislature passed meets the requirements of the Voting Rights Act. I look forward to the debate on a veto override."

On Thursday it was still unclear on whether a veto override vote can take place in the Regular Legislative Session that begins Monday or whether lawmakers will have to convene in a separate, but parallel session.

"That's one of the things we're trying to determine now in consultation with staff," said Republican Houma Rep. Tanner Magee, who as speaker pro tem is the No. 2 ranking leader in the House.

If lawmakers can't override the governor's veto or decide they don't have the votes to try, it's back to the drawing board.

But even if lawmakers are forced to draw a new map, there's virtually no chance that Republicans will pass a map with a second Black district, conceded House Democratic Caucus Chair Sam Jenkins of Shreveport.

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"We believe there's a good probability that we can sustain the governor's veto and will work hard to do so, but I'm not optimistic a second chance will yield a second minority-majority district," Jenkins said. "I don't think we'll have finality until it's decided in court."

Civil rights groups have vowed to take the state to court to force a second majority-Black district to be drawn if lawmakers don't produce their own map with one.

Not every Republican has committed to override the governor's veto, among them GOP House Caucus Chair Blake Miguez of Erath, who said Acadiana and its 3rd District Congressman Clay Higgins are short-changed by the map drawn by Republicans.

"The last time I spoke to Congressman Higgins he wasn't very happy with the process," Miguez said. "I believe he was treated poorly."

USA Today Network is seeking comment from Higgins.

Miguez is also unhappy that the 3rd District lost lower St. Martin Parish and part of Morgan City in the new map.

"I haven't decided what I will do if there is a veto override vote," he said.

Miguez was one of only three House Republicans to vote against the new congressional map — Beryl Amedee of Houma and Gabe Firment of Pollock were the others.

"The real question is whether (Republican House Speaker Clay Schexnayder of Gonzales) can bring any Democrats to the override side," Miguez said. "Last year the speaker was confident he could bring enough Democrats to override the transgender (sports ban) veto but it didn't work out."

Democratic Rep. Francis Thompson of Delhi voted for the new map because it preserves the 5th Congressional District with northeastern Louisiana as the hub. Thompson said he will stick with that vote even if it means overriding his Democratic governor.

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