

## Alabama House approves redistricting bill over objections

**AP** AL State Wire

By KIM CHANDLER

Published: Today

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Republicans in the Alabama House of Representatives pushed through a redistricting vote Thursday over the objections of black Democrats who said the map was gerrymandered to maintain white GOP dominance.

Representatives approved boundaries for the 35 Senate districts in a 71-32 party line vote. The bill now goes to Gov. Kay Ivey for her signature.

Republicans said they were confident the maps would satisfy court concerns while black lawmakers predicted they would be once again challenged.

"It seems like we are going to end up in court again," said Legislative Black Caucus Chairman John Knight, D-Montgomery. "It's clear. You can look at the map. There is racial gerrymandering."

The redistricting battle consumed the penultimate day of the legislation session as Democrats had the bills read aloud in the House and Senate, a process that took much of the day. The Alabama Senate is expected to give final approval to the House districts Friday.

"As soon as that reading is concluded, we automatically vote the bill. I expect the bill will pass along party lines," said Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston.

Federal judges in January ordered lawmakers to redraw some lines before the 2018 elections, saying Republicans had improperly made race the predominant factor in drawing districts. The ruling came after the Legislative Black Caucus and the Alabama Democratic Conference filed a lawsuit arguing that African-American voters were "stacked and packed" into designated minority districts to make neighboring districts whiter and more Republican.

Black Democrats argued Thursday that there is still "racial gerrymandering" in the plan and they had been left out of the decisions on the new bill, even though it was their lawsuit that led to the U.S. Supreme Court order for judges to review the map and the eventual court order to redraw the lines.

The tensions over redistricting and other issues - including an email sent by a GOP legislator that black lawmakers condemned as racist - spilled over into displays of sadness and anger.

"The issue in this building is racism exists in the Alabama Legislature," said Rep. Juandalyn Givan, D-Birmingham.

House Speaker Mac McCutcheon called the House into a lengthy recess Thursday night to try to defuse tensions.

Partisan and racial control of Jefferson County, home to the state's largest city, majority black Birmingham, has been a major point of contention. The county is often the focus of partisan squabbles over legislation affecting local governments. The proposed new map would maintain a slim Republican

majority in the Jefferson County delegation.

Knight said the districts of lawmakers who live outside Jefferson County were being stretched into the county to maintain a white Republican majority. Democrats wanted an even partisan split in the delegation.

Marsh said the major dispute was "all about Jefferson County and the makeup of the delegation."

"I get it. But based upon what I've seen, I do believe that these will hold up in court," Marsh said.

---

This story has been corrected to reflect that debate was Thursday.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All Rights Reserved.