

SUBJECT: Revising state representative district boundaries

COMMITTEE: Redistricting — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Jones, Giddings, Grusendorf, Hightower, Hunter, Kubiak, Price

0 nays

4 absent — Glaze, Marchant, Moreno, Wilson

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND : After the 1990 census, the Legislature in 1991 adopted a Texas House redistricting plan, which was invalidated when the U.S. Justice Department raised objections under the federal Voting Rights Act. A three-judge federal court panel ordered a temporary redistricting plan in effect for the 1992 election. Meeting in special session in 1992, the Legislature adopted a revised redistricting plan for the 1994 election. This plan was cleared by the Justice Department and the three-judge federal court panel and was used for the 1994 election, but was subsequently challenged in a federal lawsuit on the ground of racial gerrymandering.

State leaders negotiated a settlement agreement with the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, *Thomas v. Bush*. During the 74th regular session in 1995, the House adopted HR 1242 by D. Jones, endorsing the settlement agreement plan for Texas House districts.

The settlement agreement plan was submitted to the three-judge federal panel in Austin considering the *Thomas v. Bush* lawsuit. The Austin panel approved a temporary redistricting plan, for the 1996 election only, that reflected most, but not all, of the revisions in the settlement agreement. The court agreed to changes in 36 districts in Harris, Dallas and Bexar, but declined to approve changes in other districts that had not originally been challenged. Both the settlement agreement and the court's more limited changes have been cleared by the Justice Department.

The court's plan was used for the 1996 election only, and the court gave the Legislature a deadline of June 30, 1997, to submit a permanent plan for Texas House districts.

(For additional background, see House Research Organization Focus Report Number 74-16, *State, Congressional Redistricting Update*, October 6, 1995, and Number 74-27, *Redistricting: Courts Say Try Again Before Next Census*, October 15, 1996.)

DIGEST: HB 6 would enact into law the redistricting lawsuit settlement agreement for Texas House districts. In addition to codifying the changes used in the 1996 election in 36 districts in Bexar (three districts), Dallas (14) and Harris (19) counties, HB 6 would revise six districts, two each in Collin, Jefferson and Williamson counties.

The district revisions in HB 6 would take effect with the 1998 primary and general elections to select the Texas House of Representatives for the 76th Legislature. The bill would not affect the membership or districts for the 75th Legislature.

NOTES: The changes in Districts 66 and 67 in Collin County would allow local election officials to eliminate certain voter precincts with zero population. In Jefferson county, HB 6 would change Districts 21 and 22 to place the city of Groves wholly within District 21. In Williamson County, the bill would include all of the community of Anderson Mill and the city of Round Rock within District 52 and all of the city of Leander within District 53.

A related bill, HB 2254 by D. Jones, would make revisions in various other Texas House districts. Another related bill, HB 2304 by Wilson, would revise certain Texas House districts in Harris County.

The 75th Legislature is also under court-imposed deadlines to enact permanent redistricting plans to replace temporary court-ordered plans for Texas Senate districts and U.S. congressional districts.