

Governor's Column – 10/28/01

Congressional Redistricting – Not the Job of a Federal Judge

Representation – no one wants to be left out. That is part of the foundation of our system of government. Everyone should have a voice. Our ability to keep this fundamental principle is being tested right now as plans are drawn to reflect our shift from five to four congressional districts.

The 2000 census figures determined that Mississippi's population had not grown as fast as other states, and as a result we are losing a seat in the U. S. House of Representatives. A joint legislative committee has worked for several months to redraw the district lines to reflect the four new districts.

This committee has had six months to work, research and put together a plan that will be fair and representative of our people. I believe the 174 members of the Legislature can complete their work without abdicating this responsibility to a federal judge. This issue needs to be, and can be, decided here in Mississippi. The work of the Legislature should be done in the Capitol, not in a federal courtroom.

At the last meeting of the committee, three different plans were offered for consideration and rejected. It is time for this work to be brought to a close.

I have always admired Will Rogers, a great American, and the simple way he had of explaining things. He once remarked that, "even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." It is time to move on this issue.

This past week, I called a special session of the Mississippi Legislature to complete its work on congressional redistricting. The Legislature will convene at 12 noon on Thursday, November 1, to complete work begun several months ago.

I chose the date of November 1 because I wanted to offer the committee one more week to make some progress in their efforts before coming to the capitol. I spoke with Speaker Tim Ford and Lieutenant Governor Amy Tuck before calling the session, and they agreed on the date.

Any plan that comes out of the special session must be submitted to the U. S. Department of Justice for approval. This process requires approximately 60 days, and a plan must be put in place so the qualifying date of March 1 for the next congressional election is not jeopardized.

There is much at stake here. America was born out of a battle for the right to representation, and many Americans fought and died in that battle. In more recent memory, others have fought and died for the simple right to vote. We can and we will preserve this right.

Now is the time to get away from the stress of drawing the plan to the peace of mind that comes with its completion.

It was once written that “our only security is our ability to change.” I know we are capable of keeping our security intact, and that work will be accomplished this next week. It’s time to bring this matter to an end.