

# Judge blocks Galveston County voter maps

By Harvey Rice | November 23, 2011 | Updated: November 23, 2011 12:20pm

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GALVESTON - A federal judge has granted a request for the appointment of a three-judge panel to redraw voting districts in Galveston County for commissioners, justices of the peace and constables.

U.S. District Judge **Kenneth Hoyt** on Tuesday also ordered that redrawn maps for justice of the peace and constable districts, prepared by the Republican majority on Commissioners Court, may not be used for elections.

Ruling in a lawsuit filed by eight elected **Democrats** that alleges the new maps weaken minority voting strength, the judge said Galveston County failed to obtain **U.S. Justice Department** approval of the plan as required by Section 5 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The ruling means that maps drawn after the 2000 Census will remain in use for justices of the peace and constables in the next election.

Hoyt scheduled a hearing for Wednesday to decide whether the redistricting plan may be used to elect county commissioners.

Although the redrawn commissioners' districts also lack Justice Department approval, the maps they replace fail to meet a U.S. Supreme Court decision that districts have close to equal population to meet the one-man, one-vote principle. The Supreme Court said the principle applies to some offices, including commissioners, but does not apply to justice-of-the-peace and constable districts, attorney **Chad Dunn** said.

Dunn represents the three justices of the peace and three constables who joined two Democrats on Commissioners Court as plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

The judge will decide which part of the law outweighs the other.

Hoyt's decision to ask the chief judge of the 5th **U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Edith Jones**, to choose a three-judge redistricting panel follows his denial of the request earlier the same day. Hoyt offered no explanation for the change. His previous order said the panel was unnecessary because the Democrats were already disputing the Republican plan with the Justice Department.

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