

Court showdown over redistricting, religious laws

BY NOLAN MCKENDRY
The Center Square

Louisiana is at the center of two high-profile legal battles that could reshape the state's political and cultural landscape.

Both a contentious redistricting fight over congressional maps and the ongoing litigation against a law requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms will be heard by the nation's highest court.

The U.S. Supreme Court will soon take up the consolidated cases of *Robinson v. Callais* and *Louisiana v. Callais*, challenging the congressional maps drawn by the state Legislature earlier this year.

A three-judge panel from

the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Louisiana determined that the latest map amounted to a racial gerrymander. The court's order, issued in compliance with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, required the Legislature to include a second black-majority district.

The fight stems from the 2020 Census, which showed black Louisianans make up roughly one-third of the state's population. Historically, however, they've had only one black-majority congressional district out of six.

Marina Jenkins, executive director of the National Redistricting Foundation, criticized Louisiana's initial maps, saying, "For far too long Louisianans have had

to contend with a map that was not representative of the people who live and vote there. As held recently by multiple courts, the Voting Rights Act requires Louisiana to have a congressional map with two black opportunity districts."

After two years of litigation, the NRF-backed plaintiffs successfully argued that the original maps diluted black voting power. However, the newly drawn maps are now under scrutiny from a separate group of plaintiffs, self-identified as "non-African American voters," who allege the maps constitute a racial gerrymandering.

Former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, chair of the NRF, defended the maps, stating, "This should not be a difficult case for the Supreme Court to resolve. This is, after all, a Court that just last year affirmed the validity of essentially the same enforcement section of the Voting Rights Act."

Holder added, "Federal law, the Supreme Court's own precedent, and basic fairness dictate that black Louisianans vote on truly representative and fair maps."

State Attorney General Liz Murrill has filed a brief defending Senate Bill 8, the Legislature's revised map, arguing it represents a

"good-faith attempt" to balance competing legal mandates.

"Our brief urges the Supreme Court to uphold SB8 and provide clarity to states that, like Louisiana, are forced into endless litigation every time a new census requires redistricting," Murrill said.

The case is expected to be a pivotal test of how the Court interprets the VRA following its ruling in *Allen v. Milligan*.

Simultaneously, Louisiana's Ten Commandments law, passed earlier this year, faces its own constitutional challenges. The law, which requires public schools to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom, was temporarily blocked by U.S. District Judge John DeGravelles, who ruled that it likely violates the First Amendment's prohibition on government establishment of religion.

The injunction came after plaintiffs—including the Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Freedom From Religion Foundation—argued the law infringes on students' religious freedoms and forces exposure to religious doctrine.

"Religious education is very important for us to do as parents," said Darcy Roake, a minister in

the Unitarian Universalist Church and a plaintiff in the case. "That is for my husband and I to have discussions with them."

DeGravelles' opinion noted similarities between Louisiana's law and a Kentucky statute struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Stone v. Graham*. He described the law as "discriminatory and coercive," adding that its overtly religious intent makes it "unconstitutional on its face."

Murrill expressed disagreement with the ruling and vowed to appeal.

"We strongly disagree with the court's decision and will immediately appeal," said Murrill, in a statement.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has scheduled oral arguments for January, leaving the law's enforcement in limbo.

Critics of the law argue it creates an inappropriate entanglement of government and religion. Steven Green, an expert commissioned by the plaintiffs, testified that the Ten Commandments have little historical connection to America's founding documents, challenging the state's claims of their significance.

State attorneys, however, argue the lawsuit is premature since the mandated displays have not yet been implemented. They

contend that schools could design displays that align with constitutional requirements.

Louisiana's tensions with the federal government also extend to a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security over plans to release a tuberculosis-positive Chinese migrant into the country without approval from the state Health Department.

In a letter to The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Gov. Jeff Landry raised concerns about the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion project, criticizing its implementation under former Gov. John Bel Edwards and calling for further reviews of funding, permitting and environmental impacts.

Landry highlighted incomplete analyses, legal challenges and conflicts with efforts to address saltwater intrusion in the Mississippi River, questioning the project's viability under current conditions. He urged federal agencies to collaborate on ensuring the project is sustainable and cost-effective, noting that costs have doubled since 2016.

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PUBLIC NOTICES — Ouachita Parish

STATE OF LOUISIANA
PARISH OF OUACHITA
FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT
BE IT KNOWN that on this 8th day of NOVEMBER, 2024, pursuant to an order of the Court dated OCTOBER 4, 2024, we the undersigned members of the Jury Commission in and for the said Parish and State, namely, SARAH CALHOUN ALLBRITTON, HERBERT D. GUILLORY, PAMELA HIGGINS SAULSBERRY, SAM O. HENRY, IV

Duly and legally appointed and sworn to law, a quorum being present, assembled at the Clerk's Office in the Courthouse, at Monroe, Louisiana, together with Dana Benson, Clerk of Court and a member of said Commission, and did then and there perform the duties prescribed by law in the following manner to-wit: The Court ordered the drawing of 200 jurors to serve as Petit Jurors for the term of Court beginning MONDAY, JANUARY 6, 2024;

The names having been drawn by a computer indiscriminately and by lot as provided for by C.Cr.P.Art.416.1, are as follows:

Albritton, Heather Leann
Allen, Mister
Amos, Dorothy Clinton
Anderson, Margaret Fern Reitz
Ardis, Leslie Christina
Baker, Sunny Renarda
Balogun, Olasumbo Olamide
Bass, Lee Lewis
Beard, Dashawna Denise
Beard, Kindra Lynn
Beckham, Joseph Russell
Bee, Samuel George
Black, Lori Templeton
Blanchard, Benjamin Lee
Bolden, Chelsey Terez Deonne
Boyce, Tommie Jenkins
Breard Sr, Daniel Armand
Broom, Dovieta L
Brown, Annette Denean
Brown, Timothy R
Brunson, Virginia
Burris, Kevin
Byrd, Dionne Lavonne
Carradine, Arlicia Latora
Castillo, Adriana Lizeth
Christesen Jr, Eugene H
Clay, Francis Theresa
Coates, Lillian P
Corrent, Susan Saterfield
Creekmore, Nancy N
Crocker, Eric N
Cromwell, Kyle Westley
Cruz, Juan F
Culp, Tracey Lynn
Cutler, John G
Davis, James C
Davis, Jay Andrew
Decker, Robert Damian Leon
Destgermain, Noel Joseph
Dever, Ronnie D
Dobbins, Kyle Reed
Dumas, Gerald W
Dycus, Walter H
Dye, Robert Andrew
Elkins, Brandon Kane
Ellis, Brittany Purvis
Ellis, Dale
Eskew, Patty P
Eubanks, Alton Cameron
Felts, Greg Mark
Ferrer, Rhonda Michele
Finley, Kevin J
Fisher, Joshua Allen
Ford, Leigh Ann Murry
Foster, Anna Eley
Frazier Spears, Crystal Liandr
Freeman, Kaitlyn Marjorie
Frick, Gayle Hoover
Gene, Betty H
Getret, Ebbie I
Giger, Deborah J

Givens, Corey
Glenn, Cecil C
Gonzales, Tomas Cavazos
Gregory III, Rice W
Gremillion, Christa Deann
Groves, Deanne
Guidry, Stephanie Lynn
Guillotte, Cynthia Baugh
Guirlando, Louis Anthony
Hamilton, Karen S
Harrell, Aarin St John
Harris, Christina Rachelle
Harrison, Erin Brooke
Hawthorne, Jennifer Mayon
Hayden, Ashley Etier
Hayes, Quanette F
Haynes Jr, James Eugene
Hernandez, Rodney K
Hicks, Randy W
Hill, Charlotte R
Hobbs, Alexander Jermaine
Honeycutt, Jomesia Precious La
Howard, Carla Kay
Hutson, Sharon C
Jackson, Dorothy Martin
Jackson, Jermaine Dantrone
Jackson, Robert P
James, Shawn Timothy
Johnson, Adam Lamar
Johnson, Allison
Johnson, Hannah Michelle
Jolley, Wyatt Drake
Jones, Daniel Hines
Jones, Sybil T
Jordan, Evelyn Denice
Juneau, Joan Ruth
Lee, Crystal Alice
Leon, Priscilla E
Lewis, Lisa G
Lewis, Timothy C
Littlefield, Lillard Cecil
Littleton, Tracy Weldon
Loring, Wendell Thoris
Lowery, Henry Mac
Lyles-Croft, Rhonda Michelle
Marcus, Harvey Francis
Mason, Ashley Tyrone
Massey, Jamie Kay
Matherne, Dean Charles
Maze, Kelsie Jyncole
McBroom, Derek Michael
McCoin, Paula Case
McDaniel, Bridgett Mischell
McDaniel, Debra F
McKellips, Lance C
McKinley, Bobbie Sue
McNeil, Beatrice Nicole
Menzie, Kami Dawn
Meredith II, Steven Glen
Milford, Belinda Dowdy
Miller, Kathy Diane
Mock, Richard Shane
Moore, Ciera Nicole
Moore, Tommy J
Morrison, Paula Cummins
Moss, Danielle Nicole
Murray Jr, James O
Nolan, Stacy Landrum
Ozark, Christopher M
Pace, Julie Anne
Page, Anthony Dontral
Parks, Paul Eric
Patrick, Ronnie Joe
Perry, Stephanie Cousins
Pike, Joe Gregory
Poindexter Jr, Andrew Glenn
Powell, Sharon Daigle
Pratt, Gloria Jean Tuger
Prickett, Camille Grace

Ragan IV, Alfred Harmon
Rencher Jr, Varner Lamar
Ridley, Eric Dewayne
Roberts, Glenn E
Robinson, Charles Edward
Robinson, Jeffrey Dewayne
Robinson, Sharon Lynn
Robinson, Songia Renea
Rodgers, Rodriquez
Rogers, Alan Wayne
Salinas, Jessica Irene
Sams, Daniel Robinson
Sant, Jarren Elisha
Savage III, Alton Leon
Shackelford, Ernestine M
Shanas, Phyllis H
Shannon, Daniel Roger
Shelby, Amanda Caroline
Shipley, Suzonne Marie
Sims, Curtis Gregory
Smart, Ashtin McCurry
Smith, Beverly M
Smith, Columbus Edward
Smith, Parker Barrett
Smith, Stephen C
Smith, Terri L
Sparks, Robert Clayton
Staten, Tameka Mitchell
Swillie, Lydia B
Tanner, Jarrod Lamon
Tatum, Mary Lee
Taylor Jr, Douglas R
Thomas, Glynda S
Thompson, Amanda Dianne
Thornhill, Desiree Anne
Thurston, Amy Thurston
Towns, Paula M
Tull, Roxann K
Tully, Matthew J
Turnage, Debra Sue
Turner, Danny Ray
Turner, Sandra Simien
Turrentine, Nicholas Mark
Vallery, Paul
Walters, Virginia R
Warren, Lajameon
Webb, Roger Timothy
Whitlock, Roger M
Whitlock, Samantha Tatum
Wiley, Joseph Kyle
Wilhite, Jarvis Jermaine
Williams, Brendalyn Karen
Williams, Susan Renee Smith
Williams, Victoria
Wilson, Dorothy R
Wimberly, Tavareous Tarrell
Wingfield, Corey Paul
Wohlstein, Nichole E
Young, Sarah Elizabeth Schmid
Yumet, Luis A

The slips containing the names of persons listed were then placed in a separate envelope, which was sealed and the words "TWO" written thereon and placed in said box labeled "JURY BOX." The Jury Box and General Venire Box were then locked and sealed and delivered to the custody of the Clerk of said Court, subject to the orders of Court.

In testimony all of which we hereunto subscribe our names on this the 8th day of NOVEMBER, 2024, at Monroe, Louisiana. SARAH CALHOUN ALLBRITTON, HERBERT D. GUILLORY, PAMELA HIGGINS SAULSBERRY, SAM O. HENRY IV

I, Dana Benson, Clerk of Court, hereby certify that all of the members of the Jury Commission were duly summoned to attend this meeting as will appear from the Sheriff's returns endorsed on said summons, as on file in my office.

Dana Benson, Clerk of Court
1.2 | COST: \$165