

# GOP gains leverage in state reapportionment

by Leif Johnson

Republican victories at the statewide and local levels will give the GOP more control over reapportionment and redistricting—one of the hottest issues before most state legislatures in 1981.

Reapportionment of congressional districts among the states, mandated by federal law every 10 years, will see losses of as many as four seats in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic industrial states, with gains of as many as three seats in Florida and the West.

All states must redistrict not only congressional districts but also their own legislative districts under the “one man, one vote” doctrine establishing in the *Baker v. Carr* Supreme Court ruling. Even states that do not lose or gain seats in the House must redistrict, since the population has shifted.

Many feel the Democratic leadership contributed to this weakening with the heavy-handed tactics used by the Carter forces to secure the President’s re-election, the Civiletti Justice Department Abscam/Brilab stings that targeted Democratic politicians and their labor supporters, and the Democratic National Committee’s overall failure to support local candidates.

## GOP gains in state governments

Jeb Carney, executive director of GOPAC, the Republican Party’s political action committee for local races, is confident the GOP can control redistricting for 201 House seats. “These seats are in states where we have a governor and both houses, a governor and one house, a governor and 34 percent control of either house, or a governor and a strong position in either house.”

Carney also views 69 additional seats as safe from Democratic gerrymandering, either because of a Republican governor, or because of Republican control of either of the state’s houses.

This year’s local elections, which occurred in half the states, reduced from 30 to 28 those states in which

Democrats control both the state assembly and its senate; increased two-house Republican control from 12 to 13 states; and increased the number of states where control is split from 7 to 8. Republicans picked up control of one of the legislative bodies in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Montana, and Washington State, giving them majorities in both houses. In Washington, the GOP also won the gubernatorial race, now giving them control over the governors’ offices of those states.

GOPAC is, as well, making plans for 1982. They have targeted six special races in key states where they expect that vacancies from ill health will throw seats open.

One of the most difficult issues will be the creation of new districts in those states which have either lost or gained congressional seats.

New York will lose four seats; Illinois, two; Ohio, two; Pennsylvania, two; Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, and South Dakota each will lose one seat. The gainers include Florida, three; California, two; and Texas, two; Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington State each picked up one seat.

## Census disputes a factor

In the states losing congressional seats, the sharpest dispute will be over the population figures reported by the 1980 Census.

Legislatures will be given the detailed population figures on April 1, 1981, unless any one of the 15 legal actions filed by municipalities succeeds in preventing use of the Bureau of Census head counts. Detroit’s successful suit charging a heavy undercount of urban minorities is now being appealed while New York’s demand that the Bureau of Census release the addresses used for the mailed questionnaire is yet to be heard in Federal court.

Alex Lee, staff assistant to the House Subcommittee on Census and Population, fears that this year’s census undercount in the inner cities is greater than the 7.7 percent undercount found in the 1970 census. Yet the all-Democratic Black Congressional Caucus, which stands to lose heavily in the redistricting, will not dispute the 1980 census figures.

Democrats mounted a weak effort to stem the dissolution of their urban power base. Last spring, House Speaker Thomas P. O’Neill, Jr., established DEMPAC to combat GOPAC, with the modest fundraising target of only \$100,000—one-tenth of what the Republicans raised.

O’Neill’s letter of solicitation, which shrilly warned against “right-wing reactionaries” and “Republican big oil and big business,” produced little money. DEMPAC died a quiet death.