

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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November 12, 2010

Redistricting poses challenge for Democrats

By Susan Webb



By winning control of a majority of the nation's state legislatures on Tuesday, Republicans could lock in control of the U.S. House of Representatives for another decade. That's because next year state legislatures will redraw congressional district lines based on their state's population figures from the 2010 Census.

It's a process that happens every 10 years, so the districts carved out by state legislators in 2011 will stay in place until 2021. The re-mapping will affect state legislative districts as well as congressional districts. "Even if you win the presidency and the Senate, for the House these districts will stay with us for the next 10 years," a Michigan political analyst notes.

The 10-year redistricting cycle was intended to ensure equal voter representation by making sure that congressional districts match population changes. But those weirdly shaped districts you'll see on the election maps are a testimony to the way state legislators have manipulated this process to try to keep their party in power.

Michigan blogger Peter Bratt calls control of the redistricting process the "real prize" in the 2010 elections.

"In the 2001-2002 redistricting cycle following the 2000 Census," he writes, "many states,

including Texas and Pennsylvania, underwent an aggressive Republican gerrymandering developed to maximize GOP gains in 2002 and 2004. This strategy largely succeeded, allowing the Republicans to further their control of many state delegations."

With this Tuesday's results, says Tim Storey of the National Conference of State Legislatures, "The GOP, in dramatic fashion, finds itself now in the best position for both congressional and state

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legislative line drawing that it has enjoyed in the modern era of redistricting."

This week's elections mean that "Republicans now hold about 3,890, or 53 percent, of the total state legislative seats in America, the most seats in the GOP column since 1928," said Storey.

In the Midwest, Democrats now hold just 38 percent of state legislative seats, the lowest percentage there since 1956.

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Republicans went into this week's elections controlling 36 state legislative chambers. They picked up control of an additional 18 on Tuesday. "The GOP will now control at least 54 of the 99 state legislative chambers, its highest number since 1952," Storey said.

They won control of both chambers of the legislature in Alabama and North Carolina for the first time since Reconstruction. They also won control of both legislative houses in Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire and Wisconsin.

According to Storey's calculations, Republicans will be in a position to unilaterally draw the lines for 190 congressional districts, while Democrats will be able to unilaterally determine up to 70 districts at most, depending on the outcome of some undecided races.

The rest of the nation's new congressional district maps will be drawn by state legislatures where Democrats control one house and Republi-

cans the other, or by appointed commissions.

Republicans won the governorship in at least 11 states formerly held by Democrats. They include the key battleground states of Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. These states have experienced population declines and are expected to lose seats in Congress after the new Census figures are released. When Republicans will be the ones drawing the new district lines, one can expect that traditionally safe Democratic seats will be the ones eliminated.

Democrats won at least three governorships that had been held by Republicans: Vermont, Hawaii and the key state of California.

In California, although Democrats will also control both houses of the legislature, they will not have the power to draw congressional districts, since voters there passed an initiative giving that power to an independent commission.

The Census Bureau will deliver data to state legislatures in early February.



Susan Webb writes for the People's World.

Salt, health, and socialism

By PW Editorial Board

Science Daily (SD) reported on November 1 that the journal HEART published findings of an Australian research team that found when the state imposes mandatory limits to the amount of salt private industry adds to processed foods, the results of the reduction in salt content "could be 20 times more effective than voluntary curbs by industry."

SD reminds us that higher salt content is directly related to greater risks of heart disease and strokes. It is therefore incumbent on any government that cares about the health and well being of its citizens to see to it that the private economic benefits aimed at by the private sector do not trump the health needs of the general population when it comes to the level of salt added to the food supply.

You might think sick people and people at risk would show the highest level of compliance in eliminating salt from their diets, thus making for a healthier population. But the Australian scientists found if people were left to their own devices with only "doctor's orders" then cardiovascular disease in the general population would only de-

crease by 0.5%.

If the government relied on voluntary compliance and only cajoled the processed food industry to reduce the excess salt they add to their products, then cardiovascular disease in the general population would decrease by about 1%.

However, if the government mandated a healthy salt level in processed foods and made private industry comply, the scientists calculated that there would be a reduction of about 18% in cardiovascular disease in the general population.

The scientists say, however, when dealing with a large population of millions of people even the 1% decrease of cardiovascular disease brought about by voluntary compliance is "substantial." But it pales when compared with the 18% that government regulation would achieve. The government-imposed regulations amount to an almost 20-fold decrease over voluntary curbs.

The scientists also point out that salt "is not essential at such high levels" as it is found when added to food. It is just a cheap (but horribly unhealthy) way to make the product palatable.

If the government mandated a healthy salt level in processed foods and made private industry comply there would be a reduction of about 18% in cardiovascular disease.

Ecology wins, marijuana loses

By Marilyn Bechtel

As supporters celebrated the election victories of once-and-future Governor Jerry Brown and now four-term Sen. Barbara Boxer, both Democrats, they were also looking over decidedly mixed returns from the nine propositions on the Nov. 2 ballot.

In a victory for a broad bi-partisan coalition including environmentalists, labor, “clean technology” firms and current Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, voters resoundingly beat back anti-environment Prop. 23, with 61 percent voting “no.” The measure would have scuttled AB 32, the state’s landmark global warming law, by suspending it until California’s unemployment (now 12.4 percent) dropped to 5.5 percent for a year.

Prop. 23’s defeat marked the second time this year a ballot measure mainly backed by corporations and negatively affecting the environment tanked at the ballot box.

The measure that got the most national attention - Prop. 19 to legalize and tax recreational marijuana use by adults - went down with just 46 percent of the vote. Its supporters say having the measure on the ballot marked a significant step on the road to legalization, and some are already predicting another initiative effort in 2012.

In contradictory developments affecting fiscal matters, voters approved Prop. 25, to pass the state budget by a simple majority instead of the present two-thirds. But they also okayed Prop. 26, to raise the legislative threshold to two-thirds to pass many state and local fees and charges.

Before the vote, California was the only state requiring a two-thirds majority both to pass a budget and to raise taxes. With the Democrats’ legislative majority falling short of that level, and Republicans pledging no new taxes, budgets faced prolonged stalemates in many years. Now, a supermajority is still required to raise taxes. An at-



tempt to put a measure on the ballot for majority vote on all fiscal matters failed earlier this year.

Voters also resoundingly supported extending the new independent redistricting commission’s mandates to include redrawing congressional districts as well as those for the state legislature, and defeated a competing measure that would have abolished the commission altogether, returning responsibility for redistricting to the state legislature. The 14-member commission of five Democrats, five Republicans and four members registered with neither party was created by a 2008 ballot measure. It will redraw district lines based on the 2010 census results. The California Democratic Party, the state Labor Federation and others viewed the independent commission as undemocratic and wanted all redistricting returned to the legislature.

Voters also rejected a vehicle license fee surcharge to benefit state parks, rejected a measure to eliminate corporate tax breaks the legislature passed during recent budget compromises, and approved a ban on the state “borrowing” local government funds intended for local projects.

California voters cast decidedly mixed returns from the nine propositions on the Nov. 2 ballot.

Charges of coverup in police shooting

By Dan Margolis

While the details surrounding the Oct. 17 fatal police shooting of Pace University football player Danroy "D.J." Henry, 21, are murky, things became all the more suspicious when an anonymous official leaked information that Henry had been driving drunk immediately prior to the incident.

Civil rights attorney Michael Sussman, hired by Henry's family, said the leak "demonstrates that those conducting this investigation are intentionally seeking to align with those who killed D.J. or are not in control of the information being generated as part of this investigation." The leak has fueled charges of a coverup.

Henry's family has called for an independent investigation into what has been seen as a racially motivated police shooting. Many have supported the call, including even Massachusetts Republican Sen. Scott Brown, as well as that state's Gov. Deval Patrick, a Democrat.

Police contend that Henry, an African American born in Easton, tried to run officers down, and thus deadly force was necessary. However, family and friends - some of whom were on the scene - say Henry presented no danger to the police.

The charge of bias was bolstered when it was revealed that some officers, who received minor injuries, were attended to by an ambulance, even though Henry, who had been shot, was lying on the ground in handcuffs.

A search of Henry's car turned up soda, Gatorade and a toothbrush.

Elecciones 2010: Efímero triunfo ultraderechista

Por Sam Webb

El cálculo político del Partido Republicano durante los últimos dos años ha estado muy simple: frustrar a la agenda del presidente, y en especial a sus planes económicos. Y luego echarle la culpa a la Casa Blanca por la debilidad de la recuperación económica, por una tasa de desempleo de casi 10 por ciento y un déficit federal explosivo.

Confiaba el liderazgo republicano que una economía casi estancada y una recuperación sin trabajos le harían daño a Obama y a su partido en las elecciones de 2010, especialmente cuando se combinen estas con una campaña de temor al déficit y a un "gobierno intrusivo," con llamadas al racismo, al machismo y al sentimiento antiinmigrante, todas reunidas con una campaña sostenida de vituperio personal dirigida al presidente.

Los resultados electorales comprobaban que estos tenían razón. Había gente suficiente que se dejaba dominar por la frustración, que cedía a sus peores demonios y que tragaba la propaganda ultraderechista, como para transformar a las elecciones de medio mandato en una victoria de envergadura para el extremismo ultraderechista. Con una tasa de desempleo pegada al 10 por ciento y el déficit federal a niveles récord, resultaba fértil el terreno político para el regreso de la ultraderecha, en especial cuando se toman en cuenta las cantidades de

dinero realmente sin precedentes que subvencionaban a candidatos republicanos y a su demagogia.

Si hubiera andado la taza de desempleo por el 7 por ciento u menos, y si la economía hubiera mostrado índices más concretos de recuperación, el resultado hubiera sido muy distinto. A lo mejor, los republicanos y los candidatos del "Tea Party" hubieran logrado algunos avances pero nada a la escala que acaban de alcanzar.

Pero la feísima realidad económica que afecta al país ha dejado a millones en apuros, confusos y airados, buscando a los culpables pero en todos los lugares equivocados. En 2 de noviembre, dirigían su ira al presidente y su partido, al partido gobernante, a quienes culpaban por la crisis económica.

Pasó la Cámara de Representantes a manos de los Republicanos por gran margen, mientras que el Senado quedaba bajo control de los Demócratas, pero muy apenas con una flaquísima mayoría. Y resultaban elegidos también cierto número de gobernadores estatales Republicanos.

Presta todo esto nueva vida al extremismo ultraderechista en sus disfraces republicanas y "Tea Party". El terreno de la lucha ha cambiado a su favor. El momento y la iniciativa quedan por el momento en sus manos. Se puede pronosticar que los Republicanos en el Congreso van a ir a la ofensiva y aprovechar de su ventaja.

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