

Washington Monitor

With Gregg's Withdrawal at Commerce, Census Reporting Line Unclear

President Obama's announcement on February 2 that he had chosen Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) to serve as U.S. Secretary of Commerce was supposed to end weeks of speculation following the abrupt withdrawal of the President's original nominee, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson (D). Now that Gregg has also withdrawn as the nominee, however, the picture for Commerce – and also the Census Bureau – is as murky as ever.

While Gregg's decision has no bearing on the partisan makeup of the Senate (New Hampshire Governor John Lynch had agreed to nominate a Republican as a placeholder in the seat), Gregg has indicated that he will likely retire at the end of his term next year. Democrats will have a good chance of capturing the open seat during the 2010 elections – as popular Rep. Paul Hodes (D-NH) has already announced that he will run.

The more interesting aspect of the Gregg drama – as far as geographers are concerned – was the controversy over concerns about the appointment raised by black and Hispanic leaders. Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, and the National Association of Latino Elected Officials both released statements questioning Gregg's commitment to ensuring a fair and accurate count in the 2010 Census. The statements cited past attempts by Gregg to block Census funding.

As many geographers are well aware, some aspects of the Census are a political fireball – most notably the issue of sampling and how the Bureau arrives at its official population counts. This is a key question, of course, because Census numbers are used to set U.S. House and state legislative districts and to allocate important pots of federal dollars. Many researchers and advocates have long claimed that the decennial Census undercounts inner-city and minority populations. Democrats,

accordingly, have often favored sampling or other methodologies to arrive at a more-accurate count, while Republicans have countered such efforts – saying that the Constitution forbids them.

As a result of the controversy, Obama Administration officials, including Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, had indicated that the Census Bureau would report directly to the White House, bypassing what would have been the standard reporting line to a Secretary Gregg. As Gregg withdrew, he told friends privately that the Census issue was one of his key concerns – and he was said to be publically embarrassed by the flap. We will continue to watch and report on future developments and other important issues related to the 2010 Census.

The Geography of the 111th Congress and the 2010 Elections

In 2006, Democrats rode a wave into control of Congress. Their party picked up 31 U.S. House seats and six U.S. Senate seats to end 12 years of mostly Republican domination on Capitol Hill. While most wave elections do not have an equal follow up, the Democrats again were the big winners in 2008 – picking up an additional 21 House seats and either seven or eight Senate seats (pending the Minnesota outcome), giving the party sizeable majorities in both bodies.

The most easily-identifiable geographic trends in the last two election cycles have occurred in the northeast U.S. and in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In New England and surrounding states, the Democrats have staked firm control of the area's Congressional representation. Counting Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey, the only three Senate seats (out of 16) still in GOP hands are those of Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe of Maine – who are both popular moderates willing to cross party lines on key votes – and Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, who as we noted in the previous article is likely to retire in the next two years.

Democrats have also won a number of targeted House races in the north-east region in the last two elections and now control a remarkable 56 of the 64 House seats in these eight states. Most striking in the last two years has been the shift in Connecticut – which went from three Republicans and two Democrats in the 109th Congress to five Democratic members in the current Congress. New Hampshire's two House seats went from R to D in 2006 and Democrats have picked up six New York House seats in the last two elections.

Equally notable, perhaps, is the shift that has transpired in Virginia during the same timeframe. During the 109th Congress, Virginia Republicans controlled both of the Commonwealth's U.S. Senate seats and eight of the state's 11 House seats. Following the last two elections, however, the Democrats now control both Senate seats and six of the House seats. The biggest change in Virginia occurred in 2008, when the Democrats picked up three House seats and the U.S. Senate seat won by Mark Warner, but these results were perhaps foreshadowed by Jim Webb's upset victory over George Allen in 2006.

But what do the past two results mean for 2010? As far as House elections are concerned, it is clear that the Democrats will be very hard pressed to have a result matching their immediate past successes. The party's biggest obstacle will be the simple fact that many of the close, winnable districts have already changed hands. As we have noted, Democrats have done very well in states and areas that have undergone demographic shifts and were the most (negatively) impacted by the Bush presidency. The big wildcard, of course, will be the success of the Obama presidency and the economy. If things go well, the Democrats could make additional gains in 2010, but these would likely be contained to the remaining targeted dis-

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