

Table 1: House Vote, By Income Group

	1994		1996		1998	
	D	R	D	R	D	R
Less than \$15,000	60%	37%	61%	36%	57%	39%
\$15,000-\$30,000	50	48	54	43	53	44
\$30,000-\$50,000	44	54	49	49	48	49
\$50,000-\$75,000	45	54	47	52	44	54
\$75,000+	38	61	39	59	45	52

Source: Surveys by Voter News Service.

tion, health care, Social Security. The effect was predictable: a significant shift in support from Republican candidates to Democratic ones. That result creates a dilemma for the GOP as it looks ahead to the next House elections. On the one hand, whatever the causes for the GOP’s loss of support among the affluent, those same causes apparently helped Republicans gain enough ground with non-affluent voters to hold onto a House majority. But the voter bloc of those making \$75,000

or more is growing rapidly and can’t be taken for granted anymore. The GOP must decide what issues will allow it to hold onto the gains made among non-affluent voters while not losing any more ground with the affluent.

The extent to which the Republicans are successful, and the extent to which the Democrats can thwart their strategy, could determine who controls the House in 2000.

Look to the Governors— Federalism Still Lives

By Karlyn H. Bowman

In his 1988 book, *Laboratories of Democracy*, political writer David Osborne urged readers to look beyond Washington to the states for policy innovation. In the intervening decade, the states have continued to be hothouses for new ideas with governors fashioning bold approaches in areas such as welfare reform, education, campaign finance, and even tobacco policy. What has changed in the decade since Osborne’s study is the players. Five of the six crusading governors Osborne profiled were Democrats. Now, Republican governors are creating the buzz. Not only do they dominate the ranks of the nation’s governors, they are also the backbone of the Republican party.

The Line-Up

A quarter century ago, in 1973, Democratic governors presided over 31 statehouses, and Republicans 19. This wasn’t the nadir of Republican fortunes. In the years following Watergate, the ranks of GOP governors were further reduced; by 1977, only 12 were Republican, 37 Democrat. In 1985, just 16 state chief executives were Republicans, 21 in 1990.

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The recent Republican domination of the gubernatorial landscape doesn’t appear to be a fluke. Big-state Republican governors like George W. Bush in Texas, George Pataki in New York, Tom Ridge in Pennsylvania, and John Engler in Michigan, were easily re-elected despite a strong Democratic base in their states. Three of the four increased their margins over their previous election, and John Engler won an impres-

sive six out of ten Michigan voters once again. Each of these governors did well among groups that have given the GOP trouble. All four won a majority of the votes of women. They made inroads among voters with lower incomes, too. In each of these states, the Republican gubernatorial candidate won the vote of all income groups making more than \$15,000. In Illinois, another of the big 10 in terms of its population, Republicans extended their 20-year hold on the governorship with the election of George Ryan. So, too, in Ohio, where two-term GOP Governor George Voinovich was succeeded by less charismatic Bob Taft. Today, only Georgia and political powerhouse California among the top 10 have Democratic governors.

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With the kind of bench strength Republicans have, they are well positioned to turn redistricting that will occur after the year 2000 Census to their advantage. In October 1996, the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress released projections for seat gains and losses after the 2000 Census. CRS showed two-seat gains for Arizona, Georgia, and Texas, and one each for Colorado, Florida, Montana, Nevada, and Utah. More recent population data suggest that California could also gain. New York and Pennsylvania could lose two seats, and Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin, one each, based on CRS’s projections. Governors have enormous influence over the redistricting process, especially if they also control one or both houses of the state legislature.

The Results

When the dust settled and the votes were counted, the governors’ contests provided few surprises. In terms of total votes cast nationwide in gubernatorial contests, Republicans won nearly 5 million more votes than Democrats. Republicans had in one sense appeared more vulnerable at the outset of the 1998 campaign season, for they had 24 seats at stake compared to the Democrats’ 11. But to many seasoned observers, Republicans looked to be in better shape. In January, Charlie Cook, one of Washington’s best known election analysts, put

6 of the 24 GOP-held seats in the toss-up column, but none moving into the Democratic one. As he looked at the 11 Democratic-held seats, Cook put 3 in the toss-up column (the open seats in Colorado and Georgia, and the Maryland governorship occupied by Parris Glendening) and 3 as possibly moving to the Republicans (Florida, Nebraska, and Nevada). All three switched as Republican Jeb Bush defeated Buddy MacKay in Florida, Mike Johanns beat Democrat Bill Hoppner in Nebraska, and Kenny Guinn won the open seat in Nevada.

Incumbent governors seeking re-election for the most part did well. In the 18 contests where an incumbent Republican ran on November 3, 16 won. Alabama Republican Fob James had a divisive primary, and was handily defeated by well-established and well-financed Democrat Lieutenant Governor Don Siegelman. South Carolina provided one of the year’s few upsets. Usually the governor who heads the National Governor’s Association is considered safe. But David Beasley, who occupied that spot, was defeated by Democrat Jim Hodges. In three other states, Ohio, Illinois, and Idaho, Republicans extended their hold on governorships. All six incumbent Democratic governors won, as did the lone Independent running, Angus King of Maine.

Seven of eleven open seats changed parties. In nine states—Alabama, California, Florida, Nebraska, South Carolina, Iowa, Nevada, Colorado, and Minnesota—there was a change in party control of the governorship.

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A quick sketch of some of the new faces confirms the overall shift to the right. In California, Gray Davis ran as a moderate Democrat to beat Republican Dan Lungren. Lungren used campaign commercials about crime early on to try to reinforce traditional Republican strength on the issue, but Davis’s support for the death penalty dulled the advantage the attorney general had. In the Voter News Service (VNS) exit poll, Davis won the votes of those who selected crime/drugs as the most important issue facing the state, though the margin was slim. Moderate Georgia Democrat Roy Barnes received the endorsement of the National Rifle Association. No one would call Jim Hodges, who pulled a surprise upset in South Carolina, a liberal, nor could Lieutenant Governor Don Siegelman in Alabama be characterized that way. In both Alabama and South Carolina, the contestants’ fortunes were

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linked to the issue of state lotteries that voters favored. Iowans elected their first Democratic governor in nearly 30 years, Tom Vilsack.

Jeb Bush, the most prominent of the new Republican faces, doesn't shy away from his social conservative credentials, though many observers suggested he didn't wear them on his sleeve in his second try for the governor's mansion. George Ryan, who led the opposition in Illinois against ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment two decades ago, is a fixture in Illinois politics. His opponent, Glenn Poshard, a downstate Democrat, was pro-life and pro-guns, issues that separated him from Democratic Senate candidate Carol Moseley-Braun and to some degree from Ryan—but weren't strong enough to dent Ryan's political armor. According to the exit poll conducted by VNS, Ryan won the votes of those who supported and those who opposed stricter gun-control legislation. Like Ryan in Illinois, the Taft name in Ohio was well known.

Throughout the general election campaign in Republican-leaning Nebraska, the GOP candidate, Lincoln mayor Mike Johanns, had the advantage. Kenny Guinn, a former businessman and educator, faced a primary challenge from a populist conservative in Nevada, but he easily prevailed. Bill Owens in Colorado won a narrow victory over Democrat Gail Schoettler. Another new face among governors, Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho, was one of five members who left Congress to run for a state's top executive post; he was the only one who succeeded. Kempthorne recently told David Broder that he believed that "power now is irreversibly returning to the states, and that it's where the important action will be."

In 1992, Ross Perot did well in Minnesota, garnering 24% of its electorate. Now Jesse Ventura is the highest elected official of the Reform Party. Nearly 60% of the electorate in Minnesota turned out, and a plurality voted for the former wrestler, former mayor, and straight-talking radio personality. His

celebrity status no doubt contributed to the high turnout and to his surprise victory, but so did his self-identification as a fiscal conservative. When Minnesota voters were asked the most important issue in casting their vote for governor, more cited state taxes than any other issue.

The Issues

On Election Day, nearly 60% of voters in House races told VNS that things in the country were generally going in the right direction. Eighty-two percent of voters called the condition of the nation's economy excellent or good. A booming economy has filled state coffers, and the powerful economic tide helped pull many incumbent governors to victory.

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In each of the 34 races for governor where VNS conducted an exit poll in 1998, voters were asked whether their family finances were better, worse, or about the same as they had been two years ago. In only one state (New Mexico) did more than 20% say they were worse off. In California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas, where voters in gubernatorial contests were asked about the condition of their state's economy, over 80% of voters called it excellent or good.

In the eight states where voters were asked to pick one issue that mattered most to them in casting their vote for

governor, education ranked at or near the top. It appears to be more competitive in the states than at the national level, where polls usually show a substantial Democratic advantage. Texas' Bush, for example, won the votes of those who picked education as their top issue. Voters in Massachusetts thought that both Republican Paul Cellucci and Democrat Scott Harshbarger could handle education well.

In eight states, taxes were included on the list of issues people could choose in picking the one that mattered most to how they had voted for governor. Only in Minnesota were taxes (state) the top issue. Although he didn't win the votes of those people who stressed state taxes, Ventura had made opposition to tax increases a key to his campaign. In South Carolina, voters who selected taxes voted for Democrat Jim Hodges. In the remaining six states (California, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Texas), the tax issue worked for Republican candidates.

VNS included abortion as an issue people could select as most important in only three states. In California, 13% of voters stressed it; they split down the middle between pro-choice Davis and pro-life Lungren (47%). In Minnesota, 12% selected it as most important, and they voted overwhelmingly (71%) for the Republican candidate, Norm Coleman. In Maryland, 9% selected it, but VNS did not report which candidate benefited. In Illinois, 25% of voters said abortion should be legal in all cases, and they voted for the pro-life candidate, Glenn Poshard, 51 to 46%. Majorities of voters who said it should be legal in most cases (34% of the electorate), illegal in most cases (27%), and illegal in all cases (11%) backed Republican George Ryan.

The issue of state lotteries played an important role in South Carolina and Alabama. In the latter, 56% of voters approved of a "state lottery to help fund college education," and they supported the Democratic candidate who backed it. In South Carolina, 60% of voters said

yes to a state lottery, and they voted Democratic. Twenty-nine percent of voters there selected education as their top issue, and 22% gambling. Those who picked gambling voted for Republican David Beasley by 67 to 32%, while those who chose education backed Hodges by 82 to 17%.

Group Stories

In House races, blacks voted in overwhelming numbers for Democratic candidates. But a handful of Republican governors made some inroads in this Democratic stronghold. John Engler in Michigan received nearly three-in-ten African American votes in a state where blacks were nearly a fifth of the electorate. In Texas, George W. Bush got 27% of their vote. Although African Americans were just 5% of the Connecticut electorate, John Rowland garnered over 40% of their votes. In Illinois, where African Americans were 17% of the electorate, Republican George Ryan got 18% of their votes. George Pataki, in New York, got 15% of the African American vote (9% of the electorate). Bob Taft, in Ohio, got 17%. (African Americans were 10% of the electorate.) Tom Ridge got 22% of the black vote in Pennsylvania (6% of all voters).

In Michigan, where they were 37% of the electorate, union households gave Republican John Engler almost half (47%) of their votes. In Illinois, union households comprised a quarter of the electorate, and they gave Republican George Ryan 37% of their votes. Losing candidate Dan Lungren got a quarter of the union vote in California. In Ohio, union households were nearly 36% of the electorate, and Bob Taft won 40% among them. In Pennsylvania, they were 27% of the vote and gave Republican Tom Ridge half their ballots.

In the Arizona governor's race this year, Hispanics were 7% of the electorate; Republican Jane Hull won 40% of their votes. In Florida, Jeb Bush carried the Hispanic vote by a whopping 61 to 38%. In New Mexico, where Hispanics were 36% of the vote, the Republican

candidate got a third of their votes. In Texas, where Hispanics were 16% of all voters, George W. Bush won a near majority, 49%, of their ballots. Dan Lungren received only 17% of the votes of Hispanics, a sign of real problems ahead for the GOP in California where the Hispanic presence is large and growing.

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Since 1980 men and women have been voting differently—men leaning in the Republican direction, women favoring the Democrats. There was a gender gap again this year in a number of gubernatorial contests. But, in all but two states (Nevada and Ohio) where Republicans won, they carried a majority of the votes of women. Taft received 45% of the votes of women, and Guinn, in Nevada, 48%.

In 15 states VNS asked respondents whether they considered themselves part of the “conservative Christian political movement also known as the religious right.” In two states, Alabama and Tennessee, more than 30% of white voters said they do. In Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Carolina, between 20 and 29% did, and in Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio, Oregon, and Texas, between 15 and 19% did. In all of these states except Oregon and Ohio, 70% or more of these voters backed the GOP candidate. Only in Colorado, where 14% of white voters said they were part of the religious right, did more of this group vote Democratic than Republican.

Looking Ahead

Five of the six governors David Osborne profiled in 1988 were Democrats. Dick Thornburg of Pennsylvania was the lone Republican. Two became presidential candidates. One crusading liberal, Michael Dukakis, found that his liberalism did not sell in the nation as a whole. Bill Clinton was elected governor in 1978, and after a surprising defeat two years later, trimmed his liberal sails and stressed the moderation that has contributed to his success as governor and president.

The gubernatorial class of 1998 contains several who can make the transition to the White House if they choose to run. Putative Republican front-runner George W. Bush bested Al Gore in the election night exit poll (52 to 38%). He beat Gore in every region and among men and women. Most people don't know much about George Bush, so his “support” probably comes in part from his being “not Washington,” and in part from his father's current high standing. Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin, John Engler in Michigan, George Pataki in New York, Tom Ridge in Pennsylvania, and Frank Keating in Oklahoma have also been mentioned as possible presidential candidates, and each would be a strong vice-presidential pick. Of this group, all except Thompson are under age 55. New Jersey's Christy Whitman, reelected in 1997, has demurred on a presidential run, but she, too, would bring strength to the second spot.

So popular are governors these days that Senator John Ashcroft, who will likely announce his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination, has been stressing in speeches lately not only his accomplishments in Washington, but his successes as Missouri's governor as well.

In stark contrast to the torment in Washington, the spirit of innovation and the commitment to problem-solving that Osborne identified a decade ago remains alive and well in the laboratories of democracy.