

POLITICAL NUMBERS: **The Rise of the Small State**

Political Numbers, *analyzing election trends, public opinion, and voting patterns, will be a continuing feature.*

by Michael Rappeport

Two basic elements in the reality of American political life, the dominance of the Senate by Southern Democrats and the control of Democratic presidential politics by men from heavily populated industrial states, are being altered by the changing pattern in reelection probabilities of senators.

Senators from the North and from small states, generally more liberal than their Southern counterparts, are fast inheriting the power granted by the seniority system that many of them oppose. And for the first time in presidential politics since 1924, a small state may produce a Democratic presidential candidate.

These two changes have much to do with the fact that, for at least the last six years, the best predictor of an incumbent senator's reelection chances has been the population of his state—the smaller the state, the better the chance. In the three elections held during the last six years, only 29 of the 44 incumbents from the 25 most populated states were successful, while an incredible 43 of 47 incumbents were elected from the 25 smallest states. Of the 15 smallest states, only one senator (Gruening of Alaska)

was defeated.

The increasing ability of small-state politicians to be reelected, and hence acquire seniority, coupled with the aging of many of the Southern senators, means that the key positions will be taken over by men of a different ideology who are beginning to enjoy the fruits of elective longevity. This trend may be further accelerated by the fact that eight out of 11 Southern states fall into the large category where reelection probabilities are statistically less.

There are now three distinct seniority blocs among the 55 Democratic senators. (I leave Republicans out of my calculation because their seniority is not significant as long as the Senate is controlled by the Democrats.) The first group, composed of senators elected before 1958, comprises 19 senators, 10 of them Southerners. These 10 men, among the most influential in the Senate, control nine committee chairmanships, including such major ones as Appropriations (Ellender, Louisiana) and Armed Services (Stennis, Mississippi). Six of them, however, will be 70 or older this year, three of whom will be 75 or more, and one is already past 80.

In this same bloc of the 19 senior senators, the nine Northerners are, on average, younger. Only one, Stuart Symington, will be 70 this year. Five

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of the nine Northerners are from small states.

Behind the senior group is a second bloc of 22 senators elected for the first time between 1958 and 1964, and reelected sometime during the last six years. Not a single Southerner appears in this group, which stands to inherit many Senate committee chairmanships in the next few years. Only four are in their 60s, while no less than six are under 50. A few of the Democratic senators in this group come from large states where chances of reelection are less, but at least 14 come from small states, where, as we see, reelection is a better bet.

Finally, there is the junior group of 14 men, including seven from the South, who arrived in the Senate in 1965 and after. They are, for the time being, cut off from seniority by the large middle group.

Part of the explanation for the differing election probabilities between states of different size may be that small states offer more opportunities for the incumbent to do favors for a higher percentage of his constituents, to saturate the area more completely with media campaigns, and to cover the state more thoroughly in his travels.

It is worth noting that, in an ideological sense, the real measure of the ineffectiveness of the Republican Sen-

ate campaign of 1970 is the extension, practically intact, of the group of mid-seniority Northern incumbents. Those who are concerned solely with the voting behavior of the 1971 Senate will see only a minute gain. However, those with a longer view see instead a liberal group well on its way to becoming the new Senate establishment.

The small-state advantage has also had its effect on presidential politics. The last time a Democratic nominee came from any of the 30 least populated states was 1924, when John Davis was the beneficiary of a ballot tie-up between a New Yorker and a Californian. This year, however, four of the leading contenders, Muskie, Hughes, McGovern, and Jackson, are from small states and only one of the contenders, Kennedy, is from one of the 10 largest states. Humphrey comes from the 18th largest state.

The proliferation of candidates from less-populated areas is not because of a sudden change in the desirability of a large-state candidate—the politics of picking a man with substantial home electoral votes already in his pocket is still preferred. There are fewer potential large-state candidates, however, because many of these states are lacking in senators with enough seniority to have built a national image and constituency. ■

Muskie: A Sketch from

by Joseph H. Nicholson, Jr.

America is now examining Edmund Muskie, our would-be leader. His appeal to us is visceral. He is gentle father, rugged individualist, immigrant's son—a Lincoln, tall and silent, come again to a land divided.

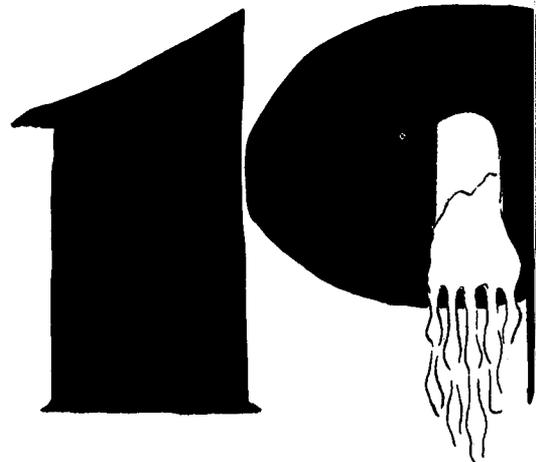
Perhaps this Muskie is merely the creation of our need for a new national belief, but somehow he does not betray the belief as quickly as most politicians. He naturally conveys America's distant heroes without the corniness of Johnson or the phoniness of Nixon. For him the stale cigar smoke that stains other professional politicians has never adhered.

Where Nixon's platitudes provoke derision, Muskie's similar platitudes receive a favorable response. He can get away with telling a Boston audience "if we all once again assume the morality, the dignity, and the clarity of purpose that have been our heritage, together we can lift the spirit of America," a statement that differs from "lift of a driving dream" only in the reaction it provoked. He can commend the American Legion for "a splendid commitment to make right the master of might" and warn graduates at a high-school commencement about "the dangers and pitfalls which surrounds you," such as "relaxed moral standards of personal behavior."

The question is not whether Muskie is real or plastic, but whether his style of leadership is suited to the presidency. I had a chance to work on

his staff for several months and observe him from the inside. My assessment is by no means definitive—it is impossible at this point, for instance, to know what Muskie will do about foreign policy issues. He has always shunned a leading role in this area, and as a senator clings to the fields of his expertise—pollution, some housing issues, and potato farming. He has not made up his mind on many other larger questions, either. But the way he makes decisions, and how he reacts under the pressures of his campaign, may be a small indicator of the way he would run the country as President.

Muskie is a counterpuncher, a defensive person who does not like to swing until he has been attacked. Probably it goes back to his first years of school in Rumford, Maine, shortly after World War I ended. There were strong prejudices against Eastern Europeans. His Yankee classmates rid-



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