

POLITICS/John Arthur Wilson

REDISTRICTING: FIRST RETURNS

In focusing too much on Congress, Democrats may have been outmaneuvered

POLITICIANS DREAD REDISTRICTING. A zig here, a zag there, and—zap! You go from the Honorable Senator Fogbottom to the soon-to-be-defeated Fogbottom. With the American population as highly mobile as it is, redistricting means that some districts will disappear while new ones pop up like mushrooms. The dislocation can be so painful that a grown politician can even decide to quit—as did 14-term Congressman Frank Annunzio, a Chicago Democrat, who, after redistricting, would have had to face another incumbent.

In our state, the four redistricting commissioners (Republicans Veda Jellen and Bill Polk and Democrats Shelly Yapp and Mary Kay Becker) spent New Year's Eve hunched over a computer, drawing their final lines before the January 1 deadline. Since then, the state's most popular political parlor game has been to guess who won the redistricting. It looks like a split decision, with Democrats prevailing (at least for the short term) in the congressional districts and the Republicans smiling (justifiably) in the legislative districts. "The process tended toward the political middle," says Yapp, because the state's depoliticized method for drawing the new lines every ten years forces a compromise between the two partisan sides.

On the federal level, the first challenge was where to put the state's new congressional district, its ninth. Growth over the past decade mandated that the new boundaries would be somewhere in the Puget Sound region. The four commissioners, serving on this first-ever bipartisan panel, set to work surveying the landscape.

Republican Jellen, an aide to King County Executive Tim Hill, and Democrat Yapp, a former Seattle Mayor Charles Royer aide and now director of the Pike Place Market Public Development Authority, traded maps. Jellen had a system of X's, O's, and O's with X's through them. The X's marked acceptable districts, the O's unacceptable ones. The O's with X's through them marked those districts that would be OK, with some changes. One part was easy: there was no disagreement about the two Eastern Washington districts.

But what about the new 9th District? "Whatever happened was going to be fairly balanced," says Republican Bill Polk, a former Speaker of the state House, who is perhaps the most partisan of the four. After pushing the lines around much of Western Washington, the commissioners settled on a suburban/rural district, taking in rapidly growing southeast King County, east Pierce County (including a bit of Tacoma), and dipping into Thurston County. The new 9th includes the home of King County Republican Council member Paul Barden, so far the only announced candidate for the seat. It also took in some heavily Democratic territory, including the home of state Senate Democratic Leader Marc Gaspard of Puyallap. (To the immediate speculation that Gaspard might run for Congress, the senator issued an unconvincing demurral.)

One thing that made the 9th a bit more Democratic than anticipated was the line-adjusting at the other end of King County, designed to make the 1st District more Republican. Incumbent Congressman John Miller, coyly saying he wants to see the results of redistricting before deciding his po-

litical fate for 1992, has been worrying other politicians who don't know if he'll try to keep his seat, run for the Senate, or leave politics entirely. Polk recalls GOP Senate candidate and 8th District Congressman Rod Chandler joking that all he cared about in redistricting was "Miller getting a good seat"—and staying out of the Senate race.

Neither Chandler nor Miller received all that they wanted. Miller wanted Whidbey Island, which would have tilted his district even more toward the Republican end, but it couldn't be pried away from the 2nd District. The commissioners did give him more Republican precincts from the Eastside, making the seesaw 1st marginally more Republican but probably not enough to ward off the likely challenge by Democratic state Representative Maria Cantwell. Whether Miller's district was sweetened enough to keep him in the House will be known in a few weeks when, he says, he'll announce his decision. "He got a bone," says Democratic consultant Ron Dotzauer, "but not with meat on it."

The 9th, jarred by those efforts to make the 1st more GOP-leaning, consequently tilted a bit Democratic. Dotzauer, who ran

9th, a swing district. The Democrats get five districts and the Republicans two; Swing claims two. The current congressional lineup: five Democrats, three Republicans.

Open the new legislative maps, however, and you'll find that here the Democrats didn't do so well. Ironically, they were tripped up by long-standing members of the party's coalition—the African-American community. Historically, especially in the South, crude gerrymandering has been used to prevent minorities from getting elected to legislatures and to Congress. This time, the mapmakers went in the opposite direction.

The redistricting commissioners, though white, were sensitive to the concerns of Seattle's heavily Democratic black community. Leaders such as Lacey Steele of the NAACP wanted a district drawn that would bolster the election chances of African-American politicians. The new 37th District obliges by extending the Central Area down through the Rainier Valley. The catch is, this new district throws Democratic state Representatives Gary Locke, John O'Brien, and Jesse Wineberry all into the same district. Wineberry, an African-Amer-



The GOP won statewide ground, but Democrats gained in congressional districts.

statewide campaigns for Booth Gardner and the late Scoop Jackson, thinks that, though the 9th leans toward the Democrats at the moment, the party will find the district increasingly hard to hold as the newcomer, independent population colors it Republican. The Democrats have another problem: if Gaspard declines to run, they have precious few congressional-caliber candidates in the new district. Democrats can take solace in having stronger congressional candidates statewide, such as Cantwell and, in the 4th District, Jim Jesernig.

The Democrats fared better elsewhere. The 2nd District, now held by Congressman Al Swift, who says he'll retire in 1994, moves back to the mainland, losing some Democratic counties on the Olympic Peninsula but making the district easier to service. The Peninsula has been ceded to the revamped 6th District of Congressman Norm Dicks. Long the Pentagon's pal, Dicks has been demilitarized, losing both Fort Lewis and McChord Air Force Base to the 9th. Tacoma, a Dicks dependency, will now have more congressional representation than Seattle, because a chunk of the City of Destiny has been dropped into the new 9th while Seattle has been turned into one big 7th District for Jim McDermott to take for granted. Jolene Unsoeld has a 3rd District that is marginally more Republican—she lost some of government-rich Thurston County—possibly causing her more re-election fits.

You could add things up this way: the 1st, marginally Republican; the 2nd, marginally Democratic; the 3rd, a swing district; the 4th, leans Republican but could swing; the 5th, Foley's fiefdom; the 6th, solidly Democratic; the 7th, eternally Democratic; the 8th, solidly Republican; the

ican rising star, will have to face the nation's longest-serving legislator, O'Brien, or the highly regarded Locke. Wineberry may find himself the most vulnerable of the trio. Ironically, there may be one less black legislator in Olympia next year.

Republicans happily went along with that Democratic request. Meanwhile, they had some fun of their own, juggling some of the neighboring districts to make them more like swing districts or actually GOP-leaning. State Senator Phil Talmadge, the cantankerous West Seattle Democrat, lost some of his more middle-class and minority precincts, only to pick up a ferry pass and Vashon Island. "The 34th was a leftover," says Republican commissioner Polk. Is that what he makes of Talmadge? "I would like to think of him that way," the former House speaker laughs. The new 11th District picks up Asian-American voters, a group not necessarily rooted in the Democratic Party. Republicans dropped a new 5th District (formerly residing near Spokane) into the Eastside, creating another solid Republican district in the Cascade foothills.

If this political sleight of hand delivers the winning cards to the GOP for the state House and Senate this fall, thank Veda Jellen, an unfailingly polite woman who reminds people of a favorite aunt. Despite her appearance, the tenacious Jellen can be fiercely partisan when it comes to protecting GOP interests. She predicts new political battlefields in Kitsap's 23rd District, Snohomish's 39th, and the new 1st District in Shoreline. Republicans already hold the Senate (25-24), and their strong candidates indicate that they will win the governor's mansion. If Jellen is right, the GOP could complete the hat trick by also claiming the House. ■