

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2010/19/1656
Creation Date(s):	[October-November] 1980
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
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The U.S. Congress

Text of report received by telex from the Ambassador in Washington

All 435 House of Representative seats and 34 (24 Democrat 10 Republican) of the 100 Senate seats were up for contest. In the 96th Congress as of election day there were in the House 273 Democrats. 159 Republicans and 3 vacancies. The Senate had 59 Democrats and 41 Republicans. The 97th Congress which takes office on 6 January 1981 will have in the House 243 Democrats and 192 Republicans and in the Senate 53 Republicans, 47 Democrats and 1 Independent. It will be the first Republican controlled Senate since 1954 and the first Congress since 1918 in which one party does not control both Houses.

2. Among the significant factors contributing to the Democratic losses were:

(A) The Democratic Party in Congress has in recent years according to the Speaker become a loose undisciplined coalition of a least five parts. There were significant geographic and ideological differences between the parts. The traditional whip system no longer functioned and members voted with an eye on their individual constituencies rather than on the national or party interest. Election law reforms in the past decade made many members less independent on political party machines. The old seniority system in Congress broke down, committee assignments were made democratically and authority tended to flow upwards from the back benches rather than downwards from the leadership. In contrast, the Republicans motivated by the possibility of obtaining power in Congress, organised themselves to achieve it. They had set themselves a target of 1982 to take control of the Senate and 1984 to take control of the House and they became a tightly disciplined group subject to direction from the Republican National Committee. (Even on this week's results incidentally almost all observers consider the 1984 target of the Republicans to be very optimistic).

- (B) The superior organisation of the Republicans at national and local level ensured that they raised more money and while precise figures are not yet available all estimates agree that the Republicans outspent the Democrats in this election by five to one. The Republicans in particular succeeded in using the new election law which though it limits individual contributions makes it possible for companies or organisations to set up political action committees which can effectively work for or against candidates without having to comply with expenditure limits. The national conservative political action committee, a thinly disguised offshoot of the conservative wing of the Republican Party played a major role in financing the defeat of targeted liberal Democrats including Senators Bayh, Church, Culver, Durkin, Magnuson and McGovern and senior House Democrats Ulman, Brademas and Ashley. It must also be said, however, that many of those senior Democrats had been in Washington for such a long period that their local organisations had become either non-effective or in some cases non-existent.
- (C) The coat-tail impact of Reagan's success is obvious. Democrat candidates had tried to distance themselves from Carter while Republicans all over the country were anxious to identify themselves with Reagan. Reagan's sweep meant that he carried with him many marginal districts and conversely Carter's dismal performance dragged down Democrats who might otherwise have won.
- (D) As far as the issues were concerned the Republicans successfully sold the line that the Democratic Congress shouldered the blame for many of the economic problems of the last decade. A series of television commercials e.g. blaming the Democratic Congress for the country's energy problems were especially effective and in the continuing anti-Washington mood which one finds throughout the United States the advantages of patronage and incumbency were not enough to counter the Republican line.

(E) The conservative swing especially on fiscal matters was felt particularly by the generation of Democrats who were swept into Congress with Kennedy in the freer spending 60's. There is obviously a growing feeling in the United States that historic pump priming Democratic programmes do not work.

3. The changes in key posts in Congress will, of course, be substantial both because of the change of control in the Senate and the defeat of senior Democrats in the House. A major loser in the Senate is Ted Kennedy who not only loses the Chairmanship of the judiciary committee and all the perks and influence that go with it but perhaps more significantly in the long run he may find his position as a liberal Democrat a lonely if not altogether unique one in the new Senate. Many other Democratic barons in the Senate will find it difficult to adjust to their new minority positions. A change comparable to that of a Minister in our system becoming an opposition front bencher. No longer, for example, will Kennedy direct the activities of the 300 staff members of the Senate Judiciary Committee many of whom were personally appointed by him. On the House side O'Neill of course remains Speaker but there will be a reshuffle of many of the chairmanships. Some of the changes may have long term implications for Irish interests for example on trade questions and tax deferral but it is obviously too early to consider what, if any, the changes might mean on these or other issues. Developments will, of course, be monitored and reported to the relevant sections as they arise.

4. From an Irish point of view McGovern's defeat is an obvious loss. He has been a consistent friend on economic and political matters and as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee he was the author of a 1977 paper on Northern Ireland published as a Senate document. He was widely consulted on Northern Ireland by many of his Senate colleagues and others and he maintained regular contact with elected Irish representatives North and South. He signed the Big Four Saint Patrick's Day statements in 1978 and 1979 but did not do so in 1980 because he

felt that it had become too green in content and also that it was being used by Kennedy for primary electoral purposes. Of the other Senators who take an interest in Irish affairs Tom Eagleton survived a tough race in Missouri and Patrick Leahy survived in Vermont. Among those who lost were Durkin in New Hampshire, Javits in New York and Church in Idaho. Of the newcomers to the Senate only D'Amato (Republican, New York) is known to have expressed an interest in Ireland. A group of prominent New York Democrats had set up a committee to support him since they considered their own nominee too liberal and among the promises made by D'Amato to the Democratic group was that he would "assist Congressman Biaggi in every possible manner in the fine work his committee is doing and will go one step further if elected and endeavour to organise a similar committee in the U.S. Senate".

5. On the House side Speaker O'Neill had his usual easy victory in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Tom Foley overcame a tough challenge in Washington State. Foley was incidentally one of the few Democrats to survive in Washington State and will undoubtedly now become one of the key figures in efforts to re-construct the party not just in his State but nationally. Among those who lost seats who had shown themselves to be well disposed to Ireland in various ways were Brademas of Indiana, Ashley of Ohio and Ulman of Oregon. Of the small group active in the ad hoc committee on Ireland Biaggi again won easily in New York but Lester Wolff of New York was a surprised loser. Of the theoretical 133 person membership of the committee 104 were re-elected.