

Redwine, Soles Remain Leaders In Realigned N.C. General Assembly

BY SUSAN USHER

Democrats will need to work harder and smarter next year, veteran legislators Rep. David Redwine of Ocean Isle Beach (D-14th District) and Sen. R.C. Soles Jr. of Tabor City (D-18th District) said this week as they prepare to take leadership roles next month in a re-defined North Carolina General Assembly where cooperation and compromise will rule.

For most of this century Democrats have controlled both chambers of the North Carolina General Assembly, and for that matter, the governorship. The November 1994 election ushered out that climate of immutability. Gov. Jim Hunt is a staunch Democrat and remains the party's most visible spokesperson. In the Senate, though, Democrats hold the majority by just two seats, and in the House, Republicans outnumber Democrats 68 to 52.

Soles and Redwine are the veteran members of the all-Democrat delegation that represents Brunswick County. Others are Rep. Dewey Hill of Lake Waccamaw, also 14th District, and Rep. Thomas Wright of Wilmington, 98th District.

Soles, who will be second in seniority in the Senate, and expects to hold its second-highest office again in 1995, predicts the new balance of power among Democrats and Republicans to lead to more cooperation and compromise and result in a shorter, not longer, 1995 session.

"It might make us better legislators," Soles suggested. "We of necessity are going to have to try to work together more. We're all working for the people of North Carolina; we have the same goal. Maybe we can come up with better solutions now that we know neither side can run over the other."

Last week House Democrats elected Redwine one of two minority whips to work with minority leader Rep. Jim Black of Mecklenburg County. If Democrats had maintained a majority in the House, the 11-year veteran was being considered for chairmanship of the powerful House

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Appropriations Committee. But with a GOP-controlled House, Democrats won't be getting any committee chairmanships, he said, so Redwine ran instead for minority whip. He was appointed to the House in 1983 to fulfill the unexpired term of Tom B. Rabon Jr., who resigned to become a lobbyist.

In the Senate the Democratic caucus decided earlier this month that Soles and Marc Basnight (D-Dare County) should return to the two top offices in the Senate, deputy president pro tem and president pro tem respectively. The official vote will come after both Senate and House convene on Jan. 25.

"We have two more votes than the Republicans and I haven't heard of anyone they're putting up," said Soles, who has been in the Senate since 1977 and served four terms in the state House. "I think they'll support me."

With a majority of just two, if they want to retain control of legislation in the Senate, Soles said Democrats will have to "work harder and be present when all the votes are taken."

The Senate has no choice but to become the spokesperson for the Democratic Party, said Soles. "With the number of Republicans in the House, they can pretty much pass anything they want over there, but legislation must be adopted by both Houses."

As a result, he and Redwine predict a greater level of compromise and cooperation among legislators of both parties. Soles anticipates legislation advancing the Democratic Party agenda, such as the governors' tax-cutting plan, to originate in the Senate and then go to the House for

consideration, with more than the usual number of conference committees named to work out compromises between Senate and House versions.

"If the Democrats stick together, we have just as much power as the Republicans do," said Soles.

Working for Democrats to "stick together" largely defines Redwine's new job as one of two House minority whips. The other will be Rep. Pete Cunningham of Charlotte.

Traditionally a legislative whip enforces party discipline, ensures attendance and rounds up support for party-backed legislation. The term "whip" comes from "whipper-in," originally a British term for the assistants who help the huntsman in handling a pack of hounds during a fox hunt.

As a lieutenant to minority leader Rep. Jim Black of Mecklenburg County, Redwine says he expects the party to expand the role of the whips. "We're going to be more involved in what Democrats do and how we do it," he said.

Among other things, their job will include taking the pulse of Democratic legislators "to see what they want to do, where they want to go," using that information to help shape the party's legislative agenda for 1995, then rounding up votes for those positions.

The party agenda might include some of the same items in the House Republicans' campaign "contract" with North Carolina, with "a different spin on them," as well as other issues of specific interest to Democrats. Redwine's suggested to Black the possibility of establishing Democratic policy committees to develop party positions on major is-

sues. "We're not going to have the votes to get things passed like we used to," said Redwine. "We're going to have to pay a smarter role than in the past."

"We need to make good arguments for what we want," he said. "If it's good for North Carolina, we hope House members would vote for it, Democrat or Republican."

Redwine anticipates the Democratic legislators will take the role of "loyal opposition," working with their Republican counterparts but pointing out shortcomings of GOP legislation and presenting constructive alternatives.

For example, he expects the formal party response to the House Republicans' "contract" with North Carolina to "show what it is, and if it is all implemented, the consequences that will have for the state."

"If any of those consequences are negative, the people ought to know it may not be as good as it sounds," said Redwine. "The problems usually lie in the details."

"We're not going to be obstructionists just because we're in the minority. We will be supportive of things we feel are good for the state."

To try to regain seats lost in November—often by close vote counts—and re-establish a House majority, Redwine said he expects the party will also move quickly to "jump start" its legislative campaign committee, identifying candidates, raising a war chest and tracking GOP votes in the House "so when the time comes we have information available to talk about what they did or didn't do, to hold them accountable for their votes."



REDWINE



SOLES

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