

[Race politics hit North Carolina redistricting](#) (Politico – May 4, 2011)

By Richard E. Cohen

The redistricting wars are about to hit North Carolina, and Republicans in the Tar Heel State are considering a controversial but well-worn strategy that has worked elsewhere in the South: Create a new majority-minority district while destroying other districts occupied by white Democrats. The state's Republicans — who are in control of the General Assembly for the first time since Reconstruction — are basically planning to blow up the current congressional map and give North Carolina a third district that has a large enough minority population to elect another African-American member of Congress. But in doing so, they'll be drawing new lines that would secure the political safety and expand the ranks of the state's congressional Republicans. The maneuvering shows that even in the new South, in a state that went for Barack Obama in 2008 and has had two straight decades of Democratic governors, congressional districts aren't immune from old-fashioned racial gerrymandering. In a sense, North Carolina is planning to catch up to race-based redistricting that has spread across the region over the years. And while Republicans hope for buy-in from local black political leaders, their greater goal is to end the careers of a handful of North Carolina Democrats who survived the 2010 GOP landslide. Reps. Larry Kissell, Mike McIntyre, Brad Miller and Heath Shuler could all be in danger of being drawn into Republican-majority districts. Reps. G.K. Butterfield and **Mel Watt** — the two African-American Democrats from the Tar Heel State — likely would be entrenched in their minority districts, as would Rep. David Price from the more liberal Research Triangle area. The six GOP incumbents would remain safe. "It's politically probable that there will be a new minority influence district. ... It's logical based on the demographics of our state," said Rep. Patrick McHenry (R-N.C.), who has become the point man in Congress for the state's redistricting. McHenry and other North Carolina Republicans defend their redistricting efforts, saying the Tar Heel State's booming population and the surge in Republican voters — not to mention the fact that Democrats drew the current districts — justify a new map that could give the state nine Republicans and four Democrats in Congress. "Republicans should pick up three seats under any fair and legal map," McHenry said. "That is huge. No other states in the nation would gain as many Republican seats. This would be in a state that Barack Obama won in 2008 and where we have had a Democratic governor since 1992 — the longest such period in the nation. A 9-4 delegation is pretty good and would attempt to avoid the risk of a bad year for Republicans. Clearly, Reps. Kissell and Miller are serving their final term." But **Watt**, a veteran of lengthy redistricting wars both in the political arena and in courtrooms, warned Republicans not to assume they will be successful in creating a third minority district. "I haven't seen a plan that can be credibly drawn. Nor is it legally required,"

Watt

said. "So I doubt that it would be practically done."

Watt

himself was embroiled in a long-term legal fight over his painfully drawn, snake-shaped minority-majority district, so his skepticism on the new North Carolina map may be a guidepost for Democrats. The result could be another extended round of litigation,

Watt

warned. The 1992 creation of his district that extends north of Charlotte led to two Supreme Court rulings and a redrawing of his district. Although Democrats were reluctant to discuss their uphill prospects in North Carolina, campaign strategists concede that they have been planning for the worst there — something of a mirror image to Illinois, where Republicans risk losing three or four seats in a Democratic-controlled state. Even assuming they jam their plan through the Legislature — Democratic Gov. Beverly Perdue has no veto power over redistricting legislation — Republicans will most likely still face a major obstacle in the Justice Department or court review. Under the Voting Rights Act, North Carolina is a covered state for review of any election law changes. “Republicans can roll the dice. But they may come up snake eyes,” said former Texas Rep. Martin Frost, who has a long history with redistricting, both in his home state and as a House Democratic leader. “They are trying to concentrate minority voters into as few districts as possible and to bleach surrounding districts with as little minority population as possible. It remains to be seen whether a Justice Department under Democratic control will go along.” In Raleigh, Republican lawmakers are moving cautiously. Rep. David Lewis, who is senior chairman of the state House Redistricting Committee, said GOP leaders are “committed to drawing fair and legal districts.” Beyond adding, “We are still analyzing all data and receiving public input,” he said he was not “comfortable” with commenting on specific options. But three well-connected North Carolina GOP sources recently told POLITICO there is “conceptual” agreement among key players for a third district that would have a substantial black population. It would be centered in Fayetteville-based Cumberland County and include numerous mostly rural adjacent counties, many of which are now represented by McIntyre. Although McHenry said blacks are “too dispersed to achieve” 50 percent in a district, they most likely would produce a majority-minority district when Hispanics and the area’s large Lumbee Indian tribe are included. Other GOP objectives include extending Butterfield’s district in eastern North Carolina closer to Raleigh. That might remove a large African-American community from the district of freshman GOP Rep. Renee Ellmers and facilitate the evisceration of Miller’s district north of Raleigh. To oust Shuler in the western part of the state, other Republicans said that perhaps half of his Democratic-leaning Asheville base could be moved to McHenry’s safely Republican adjacent district.