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McKee’s Book Explores Southern Republican Growth in U.S. House

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(St. Petersburg, Fla.) September 10, 2009 – Three sequential factors led to tremendous change for Southern House Republicans in the 1990s. Seth C. McKee, assistant professor of Political Science at USF St. Petersburg, explores these factors in his first book, Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections published by Westview Press, and explains how this large-scale partisan change has strong implications for national politics.

The Republican Party surged into majority status in the U.S. House of Representative’s Southern Delegation in the 1990s, gaining 32 seats between 1992 and 1996. With a close look at House elections from 1992-2008, McKee explains how the ascendancy of Southern Republicans was possible due to three factors: increasing Republican identification, redistricting and the emergence of viable Republican candidates. He examines partisan effects of a major redistricting in 1992 and Republican candidate emergence patterns.

“A lot of people don’t understand why redistricting can be so powerful,” McKee said. “It’s effective because once an incumbent’s district changes, a smart challenger realizes they can win. Voters added to the newly-drawn district don’t have as much loyalty to the incumbent.”

The American South, comprised of the 11 former Confederate states according to most southern political scholars, makes up almost a third of the U.S. population. The region includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

McKee also explains how the rise of Southern Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives affected the party’s national agenda and left non-Southern Republicans vulnerable to wins by Democratic challengers. In 2006 the Democrats netted 30 seats and gained back the U.S. House majority. Only six of these seats were won in the South.

“This is the latest, clear-cut instance of realignment in American Politics,” McKee said. “Students don’t need to go back to the New Deal for an example of realignment.”

McKee first explored the effects of redistricting in his PhD dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin. He earned his MS in Economics from Oklahoma State University and a BS in Political Science at the same institution. At USF St. Petersburg, McKee teaches Empirical Political Analysis, the American Presidency, American National Government and Political Behavior. Next semester he will teach Southern Politics. McKee presented two papers at this month’s annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Toronto, Canada.

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