

some 500 employees, including 130 who worked for the respected National Center for Education Statistics. (Like every other bureaucracy, hers was rife with acronyms. OERI was a POC—"principal operating component"—and Ravitch herself, as she "discovered to my alarm," was a "POC-head.") OERI also was in charge of, among other things, dozens of miscellaneous small programs, many of dubious worth but, as she soon learned, virtually all sacrosanct.

Ravitch and her deputy managed to get the ordinarily sluggish bureaucracy to produce "a steady stream of publications," but it took "constant pressure and nagging." Many career employees "worked very hard and very effectively," Ravitch says, but others, some of them making as much as \$110,000 a year, "did nothing at all, ever, and it was impossible either to remove them or to get them to do any work."

Ravitch's worst problems, however, were on Capitol Hill, where Democrats then controlled both houses of Congress. While

the senators and their staffs "were always cordial and straightforward," House Democrats and their staffs, after 40 years in the majority, "exhibited the arrogance of uncontested power." Their attitude was that they alone "decided every educational issue and the department did their bidding." Anything the department did that was not to their liking was "politicization," she notes, "but nothing that they themselves did—like directing federal funds to their favorite causes or harassing administration officials—ever amounted to 'politicization.'"

With the advent of the Clinton administration in 1993, Ravitch left public service. Among the lessons she took away with her: "The federal government is run by Congress, especially by the House of Representatives, which controls the budget and decides how much money will be spent, who will receive it, and what they may or may not spend it on." Another lesson: turnover in public office is a good thing.

## *The Motor Voter Surprise*

"Motor Trouble for Democrats" by Geoff Earle, in *Governing* (Aug. 1995),  
2300 N St. N.W., Ste. 760, Washington, D.C. 20037.

Fearing it could only hurt Republicans and help Democrats, GOP leaders in Congress and elsewhere dug in their heels against the 1994 "motor voter" law, which lets citizens register to vote when they renew their driver's licenses. Democrats, for their part, expected to sign up millions of "natural" Democrats—the poor, the young, the mobile—dissuaded from enrolling in the traditional ways. In California, GOP governor Pete Wilson called the law "flatly unconstitutional" and refused to enforce it (until a federal court last June made him); a handful of other Republican governors similarly resisted. As it turns out, however, reports Earle, an editor at *Congressional Quarterly*, it seems that if anyone should be worried, it's the Democrats.

In the first three months after the legislation took effect at the start of 1995 (later in some states), it produced two million new registrants, Earle says, including "a large new crop of independents—many of them in areas where Democrats might have

expected to reap motor voter dividends." In Kentucky, for example, where only three percent of voters were registered as independents in 1992, about 25 percent of the new voters registered as independents. Registration rose fastest in the increasingly Republican South. In Florida, 250,000 people registered under the new law. In both states, the two parties lost ground to the fast-growing independents, but the Democrats lost much more than the Republicans.

In the end, though, the motor voter law may not much hurt or help either party, Earle says. Young people and people who recently moved are prominent among motor voter registrants, and when it comes to voting, neither group acts much differently from their neighbors. If everybody who might have registered and voted in the last election had done so, Berkeley political scientist Raymond Wolfinger says, "the outcome . . . would have been about the same."