

GOP sees light despite Dem voter gains

By CRAIG McGUIRE
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Recent New York State Board of Elections enrollment figures showing the Democratic party extending its advantage over the Republicans has drawn both critical and optimistic responses from state GOP leaders.

John Sweeney, executive director of the New York State Republican party, criticized what he sees as efforts by Democrats to institutionalize their dominance in state government.

"It has less to do with the philosophies and more to do with the exploitation of government operations and agencies to promote the Democratic party."

According to Jane Thompson, spokesperson for New York Democratic Party Chair John Marino, these figures reflect hard work on local, state and national levels.

Thomson called Sweeney's comments "not even worthy of a response."

According to Sweeney, Assembly election reforms passed earlier this year are an outline for misusing state agencies.

Skip Carrier, spokesman for Assembly Speaker Saul Weprin, DL-Queens, said the

Democratic majority has sought further election reform to "involve more people in the political process."

Many Republicans attribute the increase in Democratic enrollment to the desire for change that was reflected in last year's elections.

Both parties are preparing for upcoming mayoral races in New York City and Buffalo, as well as next year's gubernatorial campaign.

"We are planning a full-court press," said Sweeney, likening his party's strategy to an intensive defensive plan in basketball.

Sweeney said the increasing unpopularity of Gov. Mario Cuomo, who has indicated he is preparing a run for a fourth term, is an asset for Republicans.

New York Republican National Committeewoman Eunice Whittlesey attributes the increase to the Clinton administration. She said the clamor for change on a national level directly resulted in the Democratic surge.

During presidential election years voter registration figures increase.

"We'll have to wait for when things settle off, about two years," said Whittlesey.

Chris McKenna, spokesman for Senate

Majority Leader Ralph Marino, said the Long Island Republican found a positive thread in the report.

"Keep in mind, this was the year of Bill

Clinton" where Democrats won a strong victory. At the same time the Republican party managed to increase enrollment, even if it did lose ground to Democrats.