

By EARL WATT • Daily Leader For the first time since 1964, Republicans took control of the Kansas House, Senate, the governor's mansion, all Congressional district seats and both U.S. Senate seats.



The conservative movement that swept across the nation Tuesday also swept in a larger number of occupants in the Kansas Legislature with 16 House seats switching from Democrat to Republican while no seat was lost to the Democrats. Republicans now control 92 of the 125 seats in the House while Democrats dropped from 49 seats to 33, and that is the largest GOP majority during Republican Carl Holmes' tenure in Topeka.

"Johnson County is down to one Democrat left in the House," Holmes said. "In several races where Democrats won, they won with less than 100 votes. So it could have been worse."

Leadership will be critical in the House with the larger Republican majority. There could be a tendency for the group that makes up 75 percent of the House to become hard to control.

"So far there is only one candidate for Speaker, and that is Mike O'Neal from Hutchinson," Holmes said. "Under that, there are six or seven running for leadership positions. I'm not sure how all of that will play out after (Tuesday's) election."

Traditionally, the Kansas Republican delegation has been split between moderates and conservatives, and Holmes was not sure which wing would be favored, but he did believe that the conservatives benefitted from the election.

"The last two years, conservatives have been running 59 to 63 votes in the House," Holmes said. "It could be in the 70s now."

But the final split in the Republican delegation in the House may actually be decided by some changes in the Senate.

There are three open Senate seats after Tuesday's election. Derek Schmidt was elected as the state's attorney general, and Mike Yoder and Tim Huelskamp will make the move from the Kansas Senate to the House of Representatives in Washington.

"Precinct people will be picking those new senate members," Holmes said. "Some House members may be interested in those seats."

The party split will also have an effect on committee appointments where most legislative action takes place.

With a larger Republican majority, fewer Democrats will be on each committee, which will affect

proposed legislation. Holmes chairs the Utilities Committee, and he has already been working with Brownback's staff to make a smooth transition on policy between the Legislature and new governor, and proposals that will come to his committee will see a new make-up in 2011.

"My committee is a 21-member committee," Holmes said. "It was made up of 12 Republicans and nine Democrats because each committee reflects the same percentage as the Legislature. Now it will have 15 Republicans and six Democrats. That will be applied to all committees in the Legislature. Before, you might have a close vote at 12-9. Now you have 15-6. There are going to be a lot different outcomes in committees."