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Call Him Al, But Will He Reverse the Charges?

"Call me Al" is no joke anymore. Indeed, it has anew meaning. For, with the notable exceptions of Sen. Al D'Amato and Rep. Susan Molinari, the new Congress is an unmitigated disaster for our city. New Yorkers seeking to influence Congress will soon learn that a call to Al D'Amato or Sue Molinari is essential in order to penetrate the new leadership - now dominated by Congresspeople with Y chromosomes from the South and Midwest.

In the House, Speaker-elect Newt Gingrich hails from Georgia and his two chief deputies, Majority Leader Richard Armey and Majority Whip Tom DeLay, are from Texas. New York City - along with the Northeastern states - does no better with the Democratic leadership. Dick Gephardt, the new minority leader, is from Missouri, David Bonior, the new minority whip, is from Michigan, and Vick Fazio, the party caucus chair, comes from California.

New York City's only GOP representative, Susan Molinari, was successful in her quest to be vice-chair of the House Republican Conference. She is now the only city politician with any clout in the realigned Congress. Charles Rangel is now the second-ranking minority member on the House Ways and Means Committee, but he will have little influence with the new chair, Bill Archer of Texas. Moreover, New York City is about to lose two members of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, Nita Lowey and Jose Serrano, whose junior status makes them vulnerable to committee restructuring.

Ironically, as New York City has lost power in the House, upstate New York and Long Island have gained substantially. Two upstate representatives, Benjamin Oilman and Gerry Solomon, will chair major committees, Foreign Affairs and House Rules, respectively. And Rep. Bill Paxon of Buffalo, chairman of the House Republican Congressional Committee, is widely credited for helping the Republicans win control of the House. Indeed, New York City's only prayer in the new House may be the pillow talk of Paxon and his better half, Molinari.

But the biggest winner - and the state's most powerful politician - is Sen. Alfonse D'Amato. As soon-to-be chair of the Banking Committee, D'Amato will surely focus some attention on Whitewater, but his committee's jurisdiction over two of the city's most critical industries - banking and securities - can also help them flourish in New York City. His position as chair of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee is particularly important, because all of the Democrat and Republic Senate leaders are from the Midwest and South.

The next two years will be excruciating for Democratic politicians from New York City most of whom have built their careers defending the arts, mass transit and health-care programs. Sen. Moynihan no longer chair of the Finance Committee will be unable to protect the Medicaid

reimbursement rates and research funding that support the city's health-care and biomedical establishments from budget-balancers. More dancers will be waiting tables and more physicians may be forced to resume house calls. Perhaps the latter will even relearn how to draw blood.

During the 1992 Democratic National Convention, the Paul Simon song, "You Can Call Me Al," referred to Al Gore. During the gubernatorial campaign, the song referred to the Sen. D'Amato's alleged puppet-mastery over George Pataki. Little did anyone realize that, in 1995, if New Yorkers want to get anything done in the nation's capital, the lyric will read, "Call Al, puh-leaze, or Sue."

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