A Changing Vote

Tracing Oklahoma's political realignment

OKH.C.8.4.B "Describe trends in political realignment from dominance by the Democratic Party following the Great Depression to the emergence of the Republican Party, exemplified by the election of Governor Henry Bellmon."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show Democratic strength, and circle two details that show Republican gains. Number the paragraphs 1 to 3 to trace how the balance between the parties changed over time.

From Democratic Dominance to Bellmon's Victory

1 During the Great Depression, a family in Oklahoma might have faced lost work, low farm prices, or a dust storm. Many voters looked to Democratic leaders, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, for help. New Deal programs offered jobs, farm support, and other federal aid. These experiences strengthened ties between many Oklahoma voters and the Democratic Party. For years afterward, Democrats dominated elections for state offices, while Republicans had less success. Dominance did not mean every person voted Democratic. It meant that, across many elections, Democrats usually held the stronger position in state government.

2 After World War II, Oklahoma's voting patterns began to show a more complicated picture. Loyalty to the Democratic Party remained strong in state politics, but Republican presidential candidates could win the state. Oklahoma voters backed Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower for president in both 1952 and 1956. A person could choose a Republican for president yet still favor Democrats for state offices. As the parties competed for voters, Republicans gained opportunities to build support beyond their earlier base. The change was uneven: success in a national race did not automatically give Republicans control of Oklahoma's state government.

3 In 1962, Republican Henry Bellmon, a farmer and former state legislator, won the race for Oklahoma governor. He became the first Republican elected governor since Oklahoma became a state in 1907. His victory showed that Republicans could now win the state's highest office, even after decades of Democratic strength. Yet one election did not erase Democratic influence: Democrats still held a majority in the state legislature when Bellmon took office. Oklahoma's realignment was a gradual change in the parties' relative strength, not a sudden switch by every voter. Bellmon's election marked an important opening for Republicans, not the end of competition.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Great Depression help establish the Democrats' long period of strength in Oklahoma?

2. What do Eisenhower's wins in 1952 and 1956 show about the shift in Oklahoma voting, even while Democrats remained strong in state politics?

3. How did Bellmon's 1962 election differ from the earlier pattern in races for Oklahoma state offices?

4. Why does the passage describe Bellmon's victory as an opening for Republicans rather than a complete switch in party control?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence radio report from the morning after Bellmon's election. Use two earlier developments from the passage to explain why his win marks a political shift, and explain why Democrats still mattered in Oklahoma politics.

ANSWER KEY

A Changing Vote

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.8.4.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show Democratic strength, and circle two details that show Republican gains. Number the paragraphs 1 to 3 to trace how the balance between the parties changed over time. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Great Depression help establish the Democrats' long period of strength in Oklahoma?	**New Deal aid strengthened many voters' ties to Democratic leaders, and Democrats went on to dominate state elections for years.**
2	What do Eisenhower's wins in 1952 and 1956 show about the shift in Oklahoma voting, even while Democrats remained strong in state politics?	**Republicans could win Oklahoma's presidential vote even while Democrats remained strong in elections for state offices.**
3	How did Bellmon's 1962 election differ from the earlier pattern in races for Oklahoma state offices?	**Democrats had long dominated state elections, but Bellmon became the first Republican elected governor since statehood.**
4	Why does the passage describe Bellmon's victory as an opening for Republicans rather than a complete switch in party control?	**Republicans won the governorship, but Democrats still held a majority in the state legislature. The parties' relative strength was changing gradually.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Oklahoma voters have elected Henry Bellmon governor, the first Republican to win the office since statehood. During the Great Depression, New Deal aid helped Democrats build lasting support in the state. More recently, Oklahoma voters backed Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower for president in 1952 and 1956, showing that Republican candidates could win statewide. Bellmon's victory extends that shift to the governorship, although Democrats still hold a majority in the state legislature.

Accept responses that distinguish Republican gains in presidential voting from Bellmon's breakthrough in a state office. Students should also recognize that Democratic strength continued after 1962.