

Debt

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districts. Interestingly enough, they are defining the tone and direction of debate on a number of critical policy issues.

Rep. Robert Aderholt's (R-AL) 4th Congressional district is a quaint and very white collection of small-town main streets, peppered by small cities like Decatur and Gadsden. It's 5.1 percent Black make-up, compared to the 90 percent of the population that is white, makes it the district with the lowest African-American population in Alabama.

Rep. Paul Broun (R-GA), one of the more vocal and controversial card-carrying members of the Tea Party Caucus, hails from Georgia's 10th Congressional district where the 19 percent Black population is a prominent fixture in the life of small cities like Athens, Evans and Augusta, but not enough to completely offset the routine challenges of post-Jim Crow era life in a district 76 percent white.

Rep. Roscoe Bartlett's (R-Md.) very rural 6th Congressional district sits in a state where 30 percent of the electorate is African American. Yet, in places like Garrett, Allegany, Frederick and Carroll Counties, the population is barely five percent Black against the district's 92 percent white make-up.

The list continues with sparsely populated rural towns and suburbs with little diversity, tucked away from the population centers of major U.S. cities that represent the overwhelming majority. But, passion and grassroots planning makes up for the deficiency in numbers. These are places where only 16 percent of the American population resides as opposed to the massive 84 percent concentrated in urban areas.

Yet, based on the latest numbers in Congress, it's that very population calling the shots in the debt-ceiling debate.

In Congress, some run farms and ranches or unsuccessful small local businesses; others are very well-to-do and wealthy, or in a

position of proving to less endowed constituents that, yes, they are down with "the people" (one reason behind constant references to old, dusty documents like the Constitution). Stuff can't move unless some rural hickness representing a Congressional district of "guns and religion" — as Candidate Obama once surmised — says it can.

It's an odd composition considering tea party members represent 11 percent of the entire U.S. Congress, including both House and Senate chambers. But, at this stage, they are running the show, particularly in the House Republican majority where the tea party faction represents a solid quarter of the entire GOP caucus. As drama unfolded throughout the week, Boehner found his leadership under siege and questions mounting about whether or not he'd be around any longer.

"The problem with the Speaker is he's busy making deals," admitted a sweaty senior Republican staffer walking towards a House office building one morning, "while his caucus is falling apart."

The perception of management malfeasance created problems for Boehner throughout the week as nearly 25 House Republicans — including members of his own state's delegation — openly revolted against his incremental debt-ceiling resolution bill, prompting the Speaker to finally cry uncle and insert the balanced budget amendment demanded by the tea party rank

Republican defiance dictated by the map

and file. That's only close to six percent of the entire House of Representatives - by week's end, 13 of those 25 accounted for members of the Tea Party Caucus — chaired by none other than firebrand

Saving Medicare



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Baba joined about 100 other people Saturday, July 30, to celebrate the 46th birthday of Medicare. Participants celebrated by walking from Safeco Field to the Pike Place Market accompanied by a marching band.

Republican presidential candidate Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R-MN).

In the background of that was tea party matriarch Sarah Palin (eager to find an opening in her beauty pageant mud fight with Bachmann), teasing Boehner and other establishment country club Republicans on

with our votes."

"P.S. Everyone I talk to still believes in contested primaries," added Palin.

"In his inability so far to whip together enough Republican votes to secure passage of his bill, Mr. Boehner has faced a triple threat of his own," recently blogged pollster Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight.com. "The first leg of the stool is the tea party. The second are first-term Republicans, who make up more than a third of his caucus. And the third is the threat of primary challenges to his members."

Watching House Republicans battle the past week was a neo-modern take on "Gangs of New York," the rhetoric flying back and forth like make shift, handmade

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Economy

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2005.

The median wealth of white U.S. households in 2009 was \$113,149, compared with \$6,325 for Hispanics and \$5,677 for blacks, according to an analysis released Tuesday

by the Pew Research Center.

The National Urban League launched its conference Wednesday in Boston with the release of the report entitled "At Risk: The State of the Black Middle Class."

Morial also is scheduled to give his annual "State of the Urban League Address" Wednesday evening at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, where he will cite the Pittsburgh affiliate of the

Urban League as an example of a successful and active affiliate.

Marriage

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have approved so-called "everything but marriage" laws, granting same-sex couples many rights.

The change in tribal law came after a four-year campaign by tribal member Heather Purser, 28, to get the marriage ordinance changed to include same-sex couples.

"I wanted to feel accepted by my tribe," Purser said Tuesday. "I was expecting a fight to be ugly. But I was so shocked. I guess I was expecting the worst out of people. I was expecting the worst out of my people."

Purser came out to her family when she was 16 and decided to campaign for gay marriage in her tribe after college.

She approached the tribal council, which she said was supportive but not encouraging. She said they told her to talk to elders about the issue and assigned a tribal attorney to work with her.

But Purser became discouraged, thinking the tribe was moving too slow. She moved to Seattle, to a gay-friendly neighborhood, where she met her partner.

Purser, who is a seafood diver for the tribe, returned to the reservation in March,

this time intent on voicing her campaign to the people at the annual general membership meeting.

She stepped to the microphone and repeated her plea for the tribe to recognize gay couples. Tribal Council members said they would continue considering it. She sat

'Everyone said aye. No one said nay'

down. But people around her encouraged to stand up again. She then asked for a voice vote.

"Everyone said aye. No one said nay," she said. Behind her, her father and brothers watched.

"I'm proud that she stood up for herself and took a stand. You bet," said Heather's father, Rob Purser. "A father's main concern is that your children are happy, and you do

what you can to help them."

Suquamish Tribe Chairman Leonard Forsman said Purser's lobbying helped the issue jump to the top of the council's priorities.

"I'm just happy that we're able to get the work done that will allow the same rights

and privileges to all people, regardless of sexual orientation," Forsman said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. "It was a process that took longer than expected. We have a lot competing needs."

Hansen said other jurisdictions will have to decide whether to uphold same-sex unions performed on the Suquamish's reservation.

At least one other tribe - the Coquille

Indian Tribe on the southern Oregon coast - recognizes same-sex marriage. The Coquille adopted its law sanctioning gay marriage in 2008. Most tribal law doesn't address the issue. In 2006, efforts to grant marriage rights at the nation's largest tribe, the Navajo, were defeated.

Same-sex marriage licenses also are granted by New York, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont, plus Washington, D.C.

The Suquamish Tribe has about 1,000 enrolled members, according to its website. Its reservation is on the shores of the Puget Sound, about an hour from Seattle. The city of Seattle is named after its most famous member, Chief Seattle, who led a confederation of tribes in the first half of the 1800s.

While Heather Purser lobbied for marriage, she said she's not yet taking that step. But her victory has helped her deal with many personal issues.

"I have a lot of bitterness inside of me. I grew up in an abusive environment," she said. "Ever since (the vote), a lot of that pain is just gone."