Black politics in the election

The Nov. 3 elections boosted the black officeholders in the South to well over the 600 mark, as compared with fewer than 80 when the Voting Rights Act went into effect in 1965. However, the level of importance of office won by blacks in the region was not elevated. Marvin Wall, research director for the Voter Education Project in Atlanta, reports that the highest level in terms of power and authority for elected blacks remains as that of state legislators, sheriffs and local judges. The black voters’ role Southwide is analyzed by Wall in a special report in this issue. RRJC staff writer Bernard Garnett reports how black candidates fared in Alabama, where the predominantly black National Democratic Party of Alabama fielded 162 candidates and the state elected its first two black legislators since Reconstruction.

ESAP funding criticized

The Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAP), a new effort of the Nixon administration to support desegregating school districts, is something less than a smashing success so far. The $75-million first installment on what is promised as a multi-billion-dollar program has attracted heavy competition in the bidding. Its handling by administration officials under Vice President Agnew’s direction has been roundly criticized.

For example, Fulton County (Ga.) Deputy Supt. Douglas McRae said the application procedure has been “handled in a fashion so grotesque and mysterious that it seemed like something straight out of Edgar Allan Poe.” McRae said his encounter with government representatives made him feel like he was “in a loan shark office.”

A detailed critique of the ESAP operation will soon be released by a coalition of civil rights organizations making a study of school desegregation (Race Relations Reporter, No. 19: Nov. 2). The coalition’s assessment of ESAP—first installment in a more comprehensive study—is expected to be highly critical of the administration’s handling of the program.

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