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## **Jeff Wice – The Go-To Expert on the Census and Redistricting**

Ross Sandler

*Jeff Wice — The Go-To Expert on the Census and Redistricting*

Jeff Wice has spent his career learning about, advising, and educating others on the importance of the census and the redistricting that follows each census. Wice is in constant demand by the press and government officials for information and advice concerning the methods and practices of redistricting. When asked why redistricting is important Wice says, “Look out the window at your streets, your roads, your hospitals, your schools, your senior centers — every way that government impacts you is determined in part by redistricting. Redistricting determines who represents you in Washington D.C., Albany, and City Hall.”

Wice, the director of the New York Census and Redistricting Institute at New York Law School, began his interest in politics at an early age. Wice’s father was politically active on Long Island and took Wice, starting when he was five years old, to political events. Wice’s mother was a homemaker who later became a high school librarian.

When Wice was in junior high school, Robert F. Kennedy was running for the United States Senate. Wice was inspired by Senator Kennedy’s career and campaign. Later as a high school student at Elmont Memorial High School in Elmont, Long Island, Wice joined up with college students who traveled to Indiana to campaign for Robert F. Kennedy in the presidential primary there that Kennedy won.

After the Kennedy campaign, Wice, then seventeen years old, connected with Adam Walinsky, a top legislative assistant and speechwriter for Kennedy. Wice, during his senior year of high school and first year of college, worked as a traveling assistant to Walinsky in Walinsky’s unsuccessful campaign for New York Attorney General.

Wice went to George Washington University in Washington, D.C. where he worked at Senator Edward M. Kennedy’s U.S. Senate office. Wice had started college as a political science major, but switched to an English major when he realized that the hands-on experience of working for Kennedy and other elected officials provided more education about politics than learning theory in school.

Wice met his wife Ellen in 1974 while working on the campaign for Allard Lowenstein, a former-Congressman who represented part of Nassau County. Lowenstein, a nationally famous leader who was associated with the Kennedys and Dr. Martin Luther King, had lost his Congressional seat due to redistricting following the 1970 census.

After New York State democrats won a majority in the Assembly, Wice opened a Washington, D.C. liaison office. In 1978, Assembly Speaker Stanley Fink asked Wice to begin working on census outreach efforts and redistricting planning for the Assembly. Fink’s concerns about the impact of the 1980 census proved to be accurate. New York State lost five congressional seats. This loss of representation underscored to Wice the importance of census outreach and education.

Wice went to Antioch School of Law in Washington D.C. While at law school, Wice’s extracurricular work focused increasingly on the census and redistricting processes. Following the 1980 census and state redistricting, Wice assisted the national Democratic Party by helping to develop the party’s first census and redistricting efforts in preparation for the 1990 census.

During the 1990s Wice was counsel to President Bill Clinton’s appointees to the 2000 Federal Census Monitoring Board, a bipartisan board charged with monitoring the Bureau of the Census’s 2000 census operations and promoting census participation. Wice traveled the country promoting census outreach efforts. Following this assignment, Wice continued to advise the Democratic National Committee on the census and redistricting during the 2000 and 2010 census cycles.

Wice’s long-term goal is to make the census an everyday topic — not an obscure one that only comes up once a decade. Wice believes that census education in schools and for the public is essential, and argues that it will help New York avoid losses of Congressional districts in the future.

Wice argues that people must understand and care about the census and the districts in which they live and vote because so much of their quality of life depends upon the census and the resulting district lines. Wice says educating the public about the census and redistricting “is part of my commitment to public service.”

— Ross Sandler