

Election Review

*from the Illinois Beverage Association
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Although most national pundits talk about last night's election in terms of "change" – and certainly Barack Obama's victory signals many new things in Washington – there was less of it outside of the presidential race.

Congress

On the congressional level, Democrats appear to have gained 5 U.S. Senate seats, giving them a total of 56; far short of the 60-plus number predicted by many observers. And in the U.S. House, they will gain a net total of 16-20; again, far short of many predictions. They will enjoy a solid majority, but many of those House Democrats are so-called "yellow dog Democrats"...fairly conservative. So, while the leadership in the White House will certainly be heading in a different direction than it's been, many of the other major players in the nation's capital remain much the same.

In Illinois, two new members of Congress were elected yesterday. Democrat Debbie Halvorson of Crete captured an open seat previously held by the GOP, and Republican Aaron Schock will become the youngest member of Congress at age 27 from the Peoria seat previously held by Ray LaHood.

Regardless of partisan preferences, all Illinoisans should benefit from increased clout within the beltway. In addition to Chicagoan Obama, our senior U.S. Senator Dick Durbin remains the number-two man on the totem pole in that chamber, and Congressman Rahm Emmanuel of Chicago will return to a top post in the U.S. House, or in President Obama's new White House.

Statehouse

In Illinois, likewise, there was very little change after yesterday's voting. In fact, the Illinois State Senate saw no change at all. Democrats will retain their 37-22 advantage. The closest challenge to an incumbent occurred in Democrat Sen. Gary Forby's district in far southern Illinois, but Forby pulled through in a tight contest. Only two members of the Senate will be unfamiliar when next January's inauguration occurs: Sen. Emil Jones III (D-Chicago), who won election to his father's seat yesterday, and Sen. Dan Duffy (R-Lake Barrington), who takes over for retiring Sen. William Peterson.

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Illinois House Democrats appear to have picked up a gain of three seats, somewhat less than what many expected, providing a 70-48 edge. Democrats captured four seats, including that of House Deputy Minority Leader Brent Hassert (R-Romeoville), but lost an open seat in downstate Centralia. New House members next January will include Democrats Michael Zalewski, Will Burns, Andre Thapedi, and Deborah Mell, all from Chicago, and Jehan Gordon (Peoria), Emily Klunk-McAsey (Lockport), Keith Farnum (Elgin) and Mark Walker (Arlington Heights). New Republicans include Michael Connelly (Lisle), Kay Hatcher (Yorkville), John Cavaletto (Salem) and Darlene Senger (Naperville). Besides Hassert, Rep. Ruth Munson (R-Elgin) was the only other incumbent to lose.

Watson steps down

Sen. Republican Leader Frank Watson announced yesterday that he will not be seeking re-election as leader of his party's caucus in the State Senate. Watson suffered a stroke a few weeks ago and wants to focus more time and energy on his recovery. Frank has been a great friend of the beverage industry and his leadership will be sorely missed, although he will retain his Senate seat. Doctors predict a full recovery for Frank, and we wish him the best.

This news will lead to a scramble among Senate Republicans for the top spot. Already, many eyes are on Deputy Minority Leader Christine Radogno (LaGrange), who is said to be favored by Watson. Radogno ran unsuccessfully for State Treasurer two years ago, losing to Alexi Giannoulis.

Senate Dems still posturing, as well

Watson's announcement came weeks after Senate President Emil Jones announced his retirement, setting off a frenzy of posturing by several hopefuls on that side of the aisle. These campaigns are waged in the back rooms and hallways of the State Capitol, so any observations of who's winning or losing are clearly speculation. And while the minority party leader is usually chosen by a simple majority of its caucus, the Senate President must have 30 votes for election, a significant portion of the Democrats' current 37 members. Handicappers have it down to John Cullerton of Chicago or James Clayborne of Belleville, but these contests are so hard to predict that anything could happen between now and January.

Also on the gossip circuit is the topic of who Gov. Rod Blagojevich will appoint to the U.S. Senate seat that was held by Sen. Obama.

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Victory in Maine!

Voters in the state of Maine overwhelmingly opted to rescind a beverage tax which included soft drinks that was imposed last year by the State Legislature and Governor. As votes were being tabulated, nearly 80 percent voted “yes” to turn back the new levy.

Legislators return to Springfield this month for its annual veto session. Little activity, outside of Senate members working to select their respective leaders, is expected.

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