

By Leah Sailhamer (PAA Central)

Ripples

By nearly every account, the 2018 election cycle was assured to be a “blue wave,” an overwhelming rejection of the Trump administration and supporters of Republican policy across the nation. But after the dust settled, did it actually happen? Well...sort of.

At the federal level, the party of the President saw significant losses in the House of Representatives, which happens during nearly every midterm election (except President Clinton’s second term in 1998 and President Bush’s first term in 2002). With Democrats now in control of the House, the challenge will be to produce substantive leadership on policy and avoid the distraction of impeachment focus for the next two years. However, Republicans not only kept control of the Senate, but grew in number. House Republicans lost 30 seats to Democrats while Senate Republicans picked up an additional two seats in North Dakota and Arizona. Keeping control of the Senate was crucial for Republicans, who can continue to advance President Trump’s judicial nominations.

In Pennsylvania, the results were a little less murky. Democrats went into Tuesday with six members of the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation and, in part thanks to the state Supreme Court order on redistricting earlier this year, picked up three more seats on Election Day. The victory brings Democrats to a 9-9 tie in the delegation with Republicans, after Chrissy Houlahan prevailed in the 6th district (formerly occupied by Rep. Ryan Costello), Mary Gay Scanlon was victorious in the 5th district (previously held by Rep. Pat Meehan), and Madeleine Dean won in the newly-created 4th district, occupying much of Montgomery County.

At the state level, Governor Wolf easily cruised to a second term, defeating Scott Wagner by 17 points. The victory demonstrates a strong showing by Wolf, who first was elected in 2014 after beating former Governor Tom Corbett by 9 points.

Going into Tuesday, state Senate Republicans held 34 of the 50 seats in the chamber and ended up losing five, reducing their total to 29. Of the five losses, Jeremy Shaffer, who had previously defeated Sen. Randy Vulakovich in the May primary, lost to Lindsay Williams in Allegheny County, while the other four seats fell in the southeast. Sen. Tom McGarrigle, who represents much of Delaware County (Chairman of Senate Urban Affairs & Housing Committee), and Sen. John Rafferty, who represents Montgomery County, both lost their re-election bids, while Republicans seeking to replace retiring Sen. Chuck McIlhinney of Bucks County and Sen. Stew Greenleaf of Montgomery County also lost. PAA will be keeping an eye on committee assignments in the Senate and we’re eager to see whom will replace Senator McGarrigle.

In the state House, Republicans also saw their numbers clipped. Going into Tuesday, Republicans controlled 121 of the 203 total seats, but will return with 109. While Republicans won in three elections, defeating Rep. Bryan Barbin in Cambria County, Rep. Helen Tai in Bucks County, and Mike Hanna Jr. in Clinton County, their defeats mirrored the Senate results and were heavily focused in the southeast. Republicans representing Delaware, Montgomery, and Chester County all lost, including Reps. Becky Corbin (R-Chester), Rep. Alex Charlton (R-Delaware), and Rep. Kate Harper (R-Montgomery).

The Crystal Ball

So what do the election results mean for the coming legislative cycle? At the top, expect the Wolf administration to push back harder with top priorities like minimum wage increases and a severance tax. With the wide margin of victory, Wolf can claim a mandate of support throughout the Commonwealth and will seek to utilize that to embolden some main goals. Also, without a re-election to worry about, expect the Governor to utilize his veto power more frequently. The administration has consistently used the lapse clause to their advantage, allowing legislation to lapse into law after 10 days per the Constitution. The action sends a clear signal that the Governor may not be a strong supporter of the

policy, but politically is willing to play ball. Expect those actions to stop unless something is offered by legislative Republicans in return.

In the Senate, leadership has frequently been sensitive to the political winds of the southeast and has avoided turbulent legislation to protect those members from difficult votes. With only Sen. Tommy Tomlinson (R-Bucks) returning to join Sen. Tom Killion (R-Delaware), expect the body to shift to the right and push more conservative legislation, allowing both Tomlinson and Killion to vote against those bills.

In the House, leadership is set to change and all signs are pointing to Rep. Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster) as the new Majority Leader. With a cadre of conservative leaders with him, expect Cutler to join the Senate in tacking further to the right. Cutler has openly signaled a departure from the policies of Rep. Dave Reed, who avoided legislation that the Governor would potentially veto. Cutler and his conservative allies are far more aggressive, so look for strong attempt to put conservative legislation on the Governor's desk. A major challenge will still be corralling the various factions of the House Republican caucus, and balancing their needs and political mindsets. With Cutler's ascent to Majority Leader, he leaves the Whip position open – a job that focuses on ensuring sufficient votes are in place for legislation. The next whip, who will be elected next week, will be a crucial herdsman for much of the next cycle's policy goals.