

What Will Election Results Mean?

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The results of yesterday's elections are not available as I write this column. Regardless of the numbers, however, there are certain trends that merit watching. At the local level, the extent of a so-called "taxpayers revolt" should be evident. Republicans fielded a candidate for chairman and a number of challengers in the supervisory districts pledged to the latest gimmick of placing a cap on property tax increases. During the referendum on the sales tax increase for transportation, there were clear indications before the vote that it was not going to pass. Leading up to this election, however, I have not felt a revolt against incumbents because of property taxes. The fact of the matter is that property tax rates have been going down while housing values have been soaring. Check out my predicted trend: the composition of the Board of Supervisors will stay essentially the same unless Democrats pick up a seat.

In state elections, I believe without having seen the numbers that the trend of Democrats losing seats in the General Assembly will actually be reversed. In the House of Delegates only about one-third of the seats are contested, and in the Senate fewer than half of the districts have competitive races. Among those races, Democrats are likely to have picked up one or two additional seats, and in the Senate the partisan balance will remain essentially the same. Democrats were advantaged by having an extremely popular Governor with whom to campaign, and Governor Mark Warner made himself available throughout the state to campaign with Democratic challengers and incumbents. Democrats also gained from an anti-anti-tax revolt – those people led by business leaders who felt that the tax cutting has gone too far and is cutting into the quality of life and economic prosperity of the state.

The most interesting outcomes on Election Day may be in the races in which the right wing of the Republican Party was challenged. These races were too close to call, but their outcomes could have great significance for the General Assembly session next year and for tax reform. Several Democrats were challenged by very conservative Republicans, and some of the most conservative Republican leaders were challenged by Democrats. If the more moderate candidates win, the resistance to meaningful tax reform may be broken.

Earlier this year, conservatives challenged moderate Republicans in primaries. In very hotly contested and expensive campaigns, the conservatives were successful in only one of about a half-dozen such races. If one or two of the most conservative leaders were knocked off in this election, I believe the moderates will feel empowered to work with Governor Warner on a budget and tax system reflective of the state's needs.

Regardless of the outcome and the accuracy of my predictions, we will pick up the pieces after the election and go forward. That is what makes our democratic republic so great!

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