

Horton's

Michigan Notebook

Political & Social Commentary

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A Few Post-Election Observations

By Steve Horton

Early in the evening of Nov. 6, NBC's election team—doing a lot of thinking out loud—decided during their back-and-forth chattering that the Democratic landslide (tabbed the Blue Wave) was failing to materialize. As it turned out, this rush-to-judgement was a bit premature and created a false impression.

I don't know how you measure success, but a report in the *Washington Post* this past Friday (Nov. 9) stated that "Democrats appear poised to pick up between 35 and 40 seats in the House, once the last races are tallied."

At last report, 11 of the House races were still too close to call, most of them in California, and were awaiting the counting of the absentee ballots.

"That would represent the biggest Democratic gain in the House since the post-Watergate election of 1974, when the party picked up 59 seats three months after Richard Nixon resigned the presidency," the *Post* story pointed out.

In addition, the Democrats, having lost a number of governorships and seats in the state legislatures in the 2010 and 2014 elections,



Elissa Slotkin, the Democratic candidate who won Michigan's 8th Congressional District, beating Republican incumbent Mike Bishop, was part of the Blue Wave that brought success to Democrats nationally and in Michigan. She was also one of many women who won office.

reversed that trend this mid-term, gaining seven of those governorships (including in Michigan) and winning hundreds of legislative seats held by Republicans.

True, the GOP has gained extra Senate seats held by Democratic incumbents—Indiana, Missouri, and North Dakota to be precise—but those were in red states, not purple or blue ones.

What happens in Florida after the recount and in Arizona after all of the ballots are counted may add to that GOP total.

As far as governance goes, who controls the Senate and by how large of a majority matters a great deal. But as far as reflecting how the overall populace feels, the House—based on ‘one man one vote’, not real estate and with all of its 435 seats up for election—would seem a more accurate measure of outcome.

In his Nov. 7th column, E.J. Dionne makes exactly this point, noting that “At this writing, Democrats are projected to win the popular vote in House races by 9.2 percent. This is a significantly larger share than the Republicans won in their own recent blowouts. Republicans got 7.1 percent in 1994, 7.2 percent in 2010 and 5.7 percent in 2014.”

Dionne did add the caveat that “Elections, like Scripture, can be interpreted in many ways. Their outcomes are relatively easy to spin, especially given Tuesday’s split House/Senate decision. But there can be no spinning the huge swing of ballots to the Democrats in the House contests, the end of unified Republican government...”

HERE IN MICHIGAN, ABOUT 4.2 MILLION VOTERS showed up at the polls, resulting in Democrats winning nearly all of the statewide races and passage of the three statewide ballot proposals. Nearly 54 percent of the voting-age population took part. It was the highest number for a midterm election since 1962.

Gretchen Whitmer won the governor’s race, topping the Republican candidate Bill Schuette. On the ticket with her and winning the lieutenant governor’s office was Garlin Gilchrist II. Jocelyn Benson was elected as the new Secretary of State, while Dana Nessel is the next Attorney General.

In another marquee race, Debbie Stabenow won her fourth six-year term as a U.S. Senator, turning back the Republican

nominee. Democrats also won open seats on the Michigan Board of Education, the University of Michigan Board of Regents, the Michigan State University Board of Trustees, and the Wayne State University Board of Governors.

One notable exception to this trend was the Michigan Supreme Court race. One of two the current justices appearing on the non-partisan ballot, Elizabeth Clement, won her election. She had been appointed by Gov. Snyder to fill a vacancy and was nominated at this summer’s Michigan Republican State Convention.

The other judicial seat was won by Megan Kathleen Cavanaugh who had been nominated at the Democratic Party Convention.

A likely explanation for Judge Clement’s victory, of her being the lone exception in this otherwise Blue Wave, was the news that came out during the campaign of her being considered a traitor by many GOP partisans—the party faithful upset with her for having voted to allow Proposal 2 (better known as the anti-gerrymandering proposal) to appear on the ballot.

She revealed to *The Detroit News* editorial board that she had faced “bullying and intimidation” from outside groups while deliberating on whether or not to allow the redistricting proposal on the November ballot. The outside groups, which she did not name, wanted her to keep it off.

She also informed the newspaper that as an apparent act of retaliation, her name was left off campaign literature that listed all of the Republican-endorsed candidates, including the other justice nominated at the GOP state convention.

I think it’s safe to say that the majority of voters, having learned of this situation, rewarded her act of judicial independence.

As for the ballot proposals, as noted, all three passed and all of them by decent margins.

Proposal 1 would allow the use and sale of recreational marijuana. Proposal 2 would establish a commission of citizens, rather than the legislature, to draw up new boundaries for the Michigan Senate, Michigan House of Representatives, and U.S. Congress every 10 years, after the census. This was known as the anti-gerrymandering proposal. It will start after the 2020 census. Proposal 3 would allow no-reason absentee voting, return the option of straight-ticket voting, and allow automatic and Election Day registration.

Both 2 and 3 had the support of the Democratic Party and its supporters, while the Republican Party and many of its backers opposed passage.

In this case, my impression is that the independents, plus those who might vote for Republican candidates but are not diehards, gave the proposals their sizable winning margins.

Another indication of success by the Democrats were two Congressional seats being flipped—Elissa Slotkin winning the 8th District and Haley Stevens the 11th. This changes the 9-5 Republican majority in the Michigan Congressional delegation to a 7-7 split.

The party also flipped several seats in the state House and Senate, narrowing the Republican advantage, but GOP still holds a majority in both chambers.

ANOTHER OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION is the increased representation by women.

Many of the candidates who flipped those Republican Congressional seats are women, including Slotkin and Stevens.

This increase in representation also occurred in the Michigan Legislature, with the number of women in the state Senate going from four to 11 and in the House from 33 to 42. These numbers include both Republicans and Democrats.

They'll, of course, join the women who were elected to the top partisan offices in the state—governor, secretary of state, and attorney general—along with the two winners in the state Supreme Court races.

Whether this increased representation at both the national and state levels will result in a change in how government works, how “things get done,” and how officials conduct themselves remains to be seen. However, given that women comprise over half of the population, having a comparable ‘say so’ in Washington and Lansing seems appropriate.