

Democrats say election results will slow impeachment process

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the final votes were being tallied, Republicans expressed bitter disappointment. Democrats, survivors of a year of White House scandal, predicted with some authority that Tuesday's midterm elections would slow the push toward impeachment.

Gleefully interpreting voters' intentions, Democratic Party chairman Roy Romer declared, "They said 'No' to the party that said 'We're going to investigate the president.'"

No matter what message voters intended to send, their actions left House Speaker Newt Gingrich and other GOP leaders facing severe second-guessing.

Voters were clear in their distaste both for the Monica Lewinsky investigation and Clinton himself.

Six out of 10 voters said they disapproved of Republican handling of the Lewinsky matter — a group that supported Democratic House candidates by a better than 2-1 margin. More than half of all voters said they want the inquiry dropped, according to exit polls.

At the same time, a majority of voters said they believe the Lewinsky issue has hurt Clinton's ability to lead, about the same percentage of people who expressed a low opinion of him as a person.

Victories over Sens. Alfonse D'Amato of New York and Lauch Faircloth of North Carolina, two longtime nemeses of President Clinton, lifted the spirits of a Democratic Party

battered by last-minute GOP advertising efforts to make an issue of the Lewinsky inquiry.

Republicans, meanwhile, struggled to maintain their House majority, a bitter development for GOP leaders who had predicted big gains.

Democrats defeated two Republican Southern governors, David Beasley of South Carolina and Fob James of Alabama, scored an upset victory in Iowa and won the single biggest race of the year: the California governor's race.

All this provided a measure of solace for the fact that Democrats lost control of the House, the Senate and America's statehouses under Clinton.

Over and over again, Gingrich claimed a minimalist victory, saying his leadership team was the first in 70 years to win the House three times in a row for Republicans.

"Every chairmanship will be Republican," he said, as if that should be enough to satisfy his rank and file.

It may not be. Gingrich quickly was challenged by conservatives who believe the leadership compromised too often in the budget process. His eleventh-hour gamble to pour millions of dollars into an anti-Clinton ad campaign didn't pay off; it might have helped turn out Democratic voters.

"Republicans tried to win on anti-Clinton sentiment, while Democrats had an agenda of issues such as Social Security and education," said Randy Tate, director of the Christian

Coalition.

Gingrich, a man whose White House aspirations now hang in the balance, was criticized by fellow Republicans with presidential ambitions.

"I think it's inevitable now that the leadership will be challenged in both chambers of Congress, and a lot of Republicans across the country will be cheering those changes," said Gary Bauer, a conservative activist who plans to run for president.

"The party came across as timid, office-clinging incumbents instead of a party of high principle and purpose," said millionaire Steve Forbes, who will unveil a tax-cutting plan today.

And this from former Vice President Dan Quayle: "We need leadership that's going to rally the Republican Party, that's going to unify the Republican Party."

As for Clinton, his supporters hoped that Republicans will quickly end the House inquiry — perhaps with a presidential censure, but no impeachment.

"I think the president has an opportunity now to move forward and get this behind him, get focused on other things," said Bill Carrick, a Democratic consultant in California.

Not so quick, others say.

Leon Panetta, Clinton's former chief of staff, said, "Both sides were engaged in trench warfare before the election, and my instincts tell me both sides may return to the trenches after the election."

Republicans disappointed with seat losses

From staff and wire reports

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defying history, Democrats battled Republicans to a standstill — and perhaps gained a few seats — Tuesday in midterm elections likely to bolster support for President Clinton on the eve of congressional impeachment proceedings.

Republicans held control of both houses of Congress, but the trend indicated a shrunken majority in the House and status quo at 55-45 in the Senate. The setback drew the ire of Nebraska Republicans, who considered their victories in the state exemplary.

"It's a disappointing night, no question about it. We've squandered a real opportunity," Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel said at a victory party in Lincoln.

Continued Republican control of the Senate came at a steep price for two incumbents. Alfonse D'Amato of New York and Lauch Faircloth of North Carolina — both Clinton critics — were ousted from office. In Illinois, Democratic Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun lost her bid for re-election.

Democrats appeared headed for gains of a few seats in the House, contrary not only to historical trends, but also a prediction that House Speaker Newt Gingrich made in a conference call to GOP lawmakers hours before the polls closed. The rank and file meets later this month in the Capitol, and Gingrich and other party leaders could draw fire.

Chuck Sigerson, chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party, said he would point to Nebraska's success during upcoming meetings of Republican leaders from around the country.

"I am going to make a point of reminding them to look at how we've won in this state instead of hiring high-priced consultants to tell them how to lose."

Hagel attributed the less-than-stellar showing to the party's failure to define an agenda and articulate it to voters.

The party's base is confused as to what the party stands for, he said.

"I don't think we've done a good job of leading or governing. All those things add up to a problem," he said.

In the House, where GOP leaders scheduled impeachment proceedings to begin later this month, Democratic gains made it possible that the GOP would lose part of their 11-seat majority. In that event, Speaker Newt Gingrich and other party leaders could find themselves challenged in the GOP caucus.



Democrats claimed the single biggest prize of the election Tuesday night when Gray Davis was elected governor of California.

Democrats celebrated other statehouse victories, ousting a pair of Southern governors and electing a governor in Iowa for the first time since 1966.

In a dynastic victory with implications for the 2000 presidential race, GOP Gov. George W. Bush won a Texas-sized re-election. His brother Jeb added the Florida statehouse to the Republican column. And Republicans held big-state governorships in Illinois, Ohio, Michigan and New York.

Democrats countered in South Carolina, where Jim Hodges toppled first-term Gov. David Beasley, ironically the chairman of the Republican Governors' Association. Alabama Republican Gov. Fob James was defeated as well.

Democrats battled everywhere to keep Republicans to minimal gains — keeping the Georgia governorship in their hands, for example, when Roy Barnes won his race to succeed Zell Miller.


One of the most intriguing gubernatorial races of the night was in Minnesota, where an independent, former pro wrestler Jesse Ventura, held a narrow lead over his two major party rivals in the race for governor.

Governor-elect Mike Johanns joked about Jesse "The Body" Ventura's victory in the Minnesota governor's race.

"If I ever see him at a governor's convention, I definitely won't challenge him to an arm-wrestling match," he said.

Michigan voters Tuesday soundly rejected a ballot measure that would have made theirs the second state to legalize physician-assisted suicide. With 16 percent of the vote counted, 71 percent were voting to keep doctors from legally prescribing lethal doses of medication for terminally ill patients. Opponents said the vote reflected dissatisfaction with the proposed law, not with assisted suicide.


The use of marijuana to ease symptoms for particular illnesses won approval in Nevada and Arizona. Arizonans reaffirmed their 1996 vote to legalize marijuana and other drugs for medical use. Nevadans passed a constitutional amendment approving medical marijuana, pending a second "yes" vote in 2000.



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