



If the current Democratic seats hold, Democrats will have 39 members in a chamber in which 32 is needed for a majority. | AP Photo/Hans Pennink

Democrats capture state Senate with biggest majority since 1912

By **BILL MAHONEY** | 11/07/2018 01:15 AM EST

ALBANY — Democrats took control of the state Senate in a convincing fashion on Tuesday night, flipping as many as eight Republican seats and losing no members in a year in which they needed a net gain of just one seat.

Democrats Monica Martinez, Jim Gaughran, Anna Kaplan and Kevin Thomas all seem to have flipped districts on Long Island, and Pete Harckham won a seat in Westchester. James Skoufis and Jen Metzger had modest leads in Hudson Valley seats that Democrats are confident will hold. And Andrew Gounardes had a roughly 1,000-vote lead over Sen. Marty Golden in Brooklyn that will likely make him a favorite in any recounts in the coming weeks.

The victory also means a long-standing glass ceiling in New York has been shattered. There have been 165 people who have been among the “three men in a room” — the fabled triumvirate of the

governor and legislative leaders that has an outsized influence on state government.

The presumptive elevation of Minority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins means that a woman will hold one of the state's top posts for the first time, and the cliché about the three men will have to be revised or shelved.

"It's absolutely incredible," said Sen.-elect Alessandra Biaggi (D-Bronx). "She is not only just incredibly brilliant but she's a steady hand in Albany and will bring to the table, finally, a woman's perspective, which Albany so desperately needs."

Due in large part to Biaggi's defeat of former Independent Democratic Conference leader Jeff Klein in September's primary, Democrats are confident their numerical majority will translate into a governing majority.

That hasn't always been the case. Democrats technically won majorities in 2012 and 2016, but the IDC and Sen. Simcha Felder of Brooklyn formed coalitions with the GOP on both occasions. After the 1964 and 2008 elections, the only other occasions in which Democrats have won a majority since World War II, their advantage was too small to maintain control.

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But if the current Democratic seats hold, Democrats will have 39 members in a chamber in which 32 is needed for a majority. A 39-24 edge would be the biggest majority the party has enjoyed in the chamber since they won 16 more seats than Republicans in 1912. And it might grow even larger,

should Felder decide to join the new majority.

That leaves them with plenty of breathing room to deal with possible dissenters. And Democrats believe that the incoming crop will be more cohesive than in years past.

“The quality of the membership in our conference is decidedly better than it was in 2008,” said Sen. Neil Breslin of suburban Albany, who presided over the chamber on the 2009 day when a coup by Republicans and two Democrats brought the chamber into a summer of chaos.

“We don’t have a number of people who ended up ... being involved in the criminal justice system,” he said. “The six who won in the primaries against the IDC, I think by and large are a very qualified group, very committed to participating on a team that protects both downstate and upstate, and they will know that they’re on a team that will go in a very deliberate fashion to make sure that no one has advantages over another part of the state, and that we’re progressive but fair.”

One of the outstanding questions remains just how this new crop of liberals will influence the chamber. Republicans have warned that the new members will push a Democratic majority far to the left in a rush to create new socialist programs.

But Breslin said that while there hasn’t been “a great deal of organized preparation for something that hasn’t happened,” he envisions a Democratic majority starting with the “low-hanging fruit.”

“Hopefully we’ll start with some voting reform, early [voting], no excuses for absentee,” he said. “I think after that, the Child Victims Act would be something that would be passed, I can see starting to talk about reform on contributions to candidates ... Also, to make sure we codify any gaps in *Roe v. Wade*.”

On more complicated topics like single-payer health care, he says there will likely be a more deliberative process: “I think we’ll start having a number of hearings that will last a significantly long time, because it’s a ... multi-dimensional issue.”

Biaggi also mentioned issues like rent laws, which are due to expire in June and will likely dominate the closing months of next year’s session, but seems to largely agree with Breslin’s approach.

“I’m of the philosophy, as you can probably imagine from the race that I ran, that anything is possible, but a lot of things will take time,” she said. “Some of them we want to take time because we want to get them right.”

The Democratic victories meant that some of the most prominent Republicans in Albany have had their careers brought to an end. Sen. Kemp Hannon, who lost to Thomas, was elected to the Assembly in 1976 and the Senate in 1989. Marcellino, Gaughran's foe, first took office in 1995.

But Republicans say they'll still remain a force in state politics.

"While tonight's results are disappointing, the Senate Republican Conference will continue to be a strong and important voice in Albany — standing up for hardworking taxpayers, advancing policies that help businesses create new jobs and new opportunities, and working every day to keep our families secure and safe," Majority Leader John Flanagan said in a statement.

"When we need to push back, we will push back. And where we can find common ground, we will always seek it. This election is over, but our mission is not. Senate Republicans will never stop advocating for the principles we believe in or the agenda that New Yorkers and their families deserve."

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