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THE ELECTION'S IMPACT ON NEW YORK'S RURAL SCHOOLS

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An extraordinary event and a dramatic turn in American politics has created a wave of both exultation and fear, excitement and near despair. As a great nation, we will sort it out over time, but in

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the short term, we need to assess whether and how this election will affect rural education in our state. Political scientists can hardly contain themselves in their attempt to explain the phenomenon. Perhaps a delayed reaction to the economy (which has improved dramatically in recent years but has omitted many folks in its recovery.) Maybe people wanted to avoid a political dynasty or were offended or anxious by candidate ethics. Maybe it was gun control and emails over insensitivity. The pundits will tell you that America almost always elects the candidate of the opposing party after two terms of the other. Maybe it was gender, race or merely political miscalculation. Did the Democrats pick a candidate that failed to attract mainstream party members, while not being extreme enough to excite fringe groups? We'll leave all of that for CNN and Fox News to debate ad nauseam. My own assessment puts another factor at the forefront. Rural America spoke loudly. The economically disadvantaged in all geographic areas demanded to have their issues addressed.

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I believe that rural Americans felt alienated from the status quo and that they anticipated the continuation of that status quo under Hillary Clinton. They felt left behind and ignored. While the overall economy was better, there were still few jobs (particularly for those without college or job related certificates) in their communities. The cities might be doing better, but things were still stagnant in their back yard and they were angry. They mobilized in numbers that are unmatched in our generation. That act of social rebellion only took their vote of protest and they voted for Donald Trump despite 56 percent of supporters saying they were either concerned or scared of the prospect of his actual presidency. They were sending a message, knowing that to do so might well have unintended consequences. It was a risk, a cry for help and a demand that someone pay attention. It was the same defiance and zeal we've seen in property taxpayers and anti-testing parents.

New York State was divided but (matching voter enrollment) went Democratic. The vote upstate was more heavily in favor of Donald Trump but as a state, we were more divided than most. What we know about Donald Trump's agenda for public education is pretty straightforward, but perhaps less viable in terms of policy than of politics. Simply put, he wants to use exist-

ing federal funds to pay for vouchers instead of existing federal programs. \$20 billion worth, going out of Title 1 and special ed and into paying private and parochial schools to educate students in traditionally unsuccessful schools. He is considering eliminating the U.S. Department of Education and hasn't named someone to head education for his transition team. He favors competition between the private and public schools and hopes the poor public schools simply die by attrition in the face of competition. He feels the system would be less costly and more efficient as a result. He has not said how the loss of federal funding (which for New York would amount to two years' worth of Education Aid increases) would affect our struggling schools' ability to compete. For more on this, see NYSSBA's On Board Special Edition.

Congress is unlikely to entertain a wholesale rewrite of the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act, but they may well pass a law prohibiting the USDOE and its Secretary of Education from expanding regulations beyond the bare language of the statute (as they have thus far attempted to do in a number of areas.) Eliminating the USDOE would obviously free up the new administration to reallocate some existing federal funding, but most programs are firmly written in law and paid on a multiyear cycle. Suffice it to say that the federal role in public education is likely to be in flux and a battle for funding awaits us.

Here at home in New York State, the election has had a less dramatic but perhaps no less profound impact. The Assembly remains firmly within Democratic control, while the Senate Republicans added one to their narrow majority. They have wisely indicated that they will continue to work with the Independent Democratic Caucus to ensure they have the votes to pass their agenda (but no doubt allowing some flexibility to the IDC on their key agenda items in order to maintain the partnership.) School Choice advocates heavily contributed to retaining the Republican Senate Majority and they will want to be heard, legislatively. The governor was unsuccessful in efforts to gain a Democrat majority, which would have solidified him as the state's political and policy leader. Despite this, he may well advance what he believes to be a nationally focused agenda here at home, positioning himself for a 2020 presidential run. Public education does not appear to remain at the top of that agenda. While the state rests in the moratorium of APPR, no one is likely to want to stir the hornets' nest that was the anti-testing/teacher evaluation/standards debacle.

We are in the middle of the governor's election cycle; a time when governors take the opportunity to lower education funding in favor of those agencies that have been frozen (in order to fund public education leading up to election.) In New York, state agencies have bitten the bullet for three years of frozen budgets in order to make room for 5 and 6% education aid increases. The GEA is gone and legislators may well say "You wanted GEA gone and we did it. Now it's someone else's turn." State revenue is stable but there are no surpluses and the decade old Foundation Aid formula is in desperate need of revision to account for poverty and other student needs. It's not an enticing recipe for continued improvement. Our state's loyalty to the Shares Agreement that provides a certain percentage of aid to the three major geographic areas of the state, as well as our need to fund Reimbursable Aid (Transportation, BOCES, Building and Special Education Aids) gives our leaders little leeway for aid reform.

Finally, in our haste to proclaim the new direction and message that a Trump victory brings and prior to rushing headlong into policy based on that public pronouncement, we need to keep in mind that at this count, more people in this country voted for Hillary Clinton. While the Electoral College vote was not close and while Trump won the majority of states, he did not win the popular vote. To other nations, that appears inconsistent

with our democratic ideology. Here at home if we are to move forward with badly needed new public policy it means that we need to recognize the need for social healing and political coalition building. It means we need to begin working together to explain the needs that were so dramatically demanded on Election Day. Campaigning and governing don't have much in common and both our federal and state governments are at a point where governing is crucial. On Election Day, our rural communities and our low wealth communities demanded the attention they require. Having demanded the attention, it's now up to all of us to prove our case and offer productive policies. If it is a new day in America, then we must seize that day for our students, our communities, our state and our future.



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