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## While GOP gains nationally, Illinois remains split

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Even in the face of a massive Republican national wave, the state of Illinois remains split between the major parties.

Republican Mark Kirk's capture of President Barack Obama's former U.S. Senate seat is a feather in the GOP's cap nationally, but Kirk's victory also reflected the flaws in the Democratic candidate, state Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias.

Republicans made gains in the Illinois General Assembly, but both chambers remain in Democratic hands.

But Tuesday's race for the office that has the most day-to-day impact on the lives of Illinoisans -- the governor -- remained neck-and-neck late Tuesday.

Illinois had been moving toward the Democratic column following 26 years of Republican governors. Then Democrat Rod Blagojevich came on the scene in 2002, and was replaced after his impeachment in 2009 by Democrat Pat Quinn, who Tuesday faced a much more conservative alternative, Bloomington GOP state Sen. Bill Brady.

Quinn has been unable to get his own party to go along with a tax increase. But state government's gaping budget hole -- perhaps \$13 billion -- dominated the campaign, giving the anti-tax Brady a chance to harp on the state's fiscal failures.

No matter who emerges victorious, says a political scientist from the University of Illinois Springfield, he won't have an easy job.

"Whatever happens, there's bad times ahead," said Chris Mooney of the U of I's Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Brady's message was consistent: don't raise taxes, cut spending, borrow little and make Illinois friendly for business.

If he wins and remains true to his word to cut "a dime of every dollar" out of state government, get ready for the pain.

"Services will be cut dramatically if he does what he says he's going to do," Mooney said. "There's nothing like that kind of fat and waste in Illinois government."

Quinn benefited from the split the GOP experienced in the primary back in February. In normal circumstances, Republicans win top statewide offices only when they are moderate on some issues.

Brady, however, is much more conservative, opposing abortion and supporting gun rights, including concealed carry.

Quinn was hoping that Brady's views on such issues would bring the more moderate electorate the Democrats' way. But Quinn, in turn, was hampered by his own mistakes -- giving hefty pay raises to senior staff members while ordering underlings to take furloughs and an early release program for prison inmates.

Many voters in the Senate race had misgivings about those candidates too.

"It was really a bad choice," said Dr. Jim Madison, 65, a Springfield urologist. But, he added, "Giannoulias, I don't trust at all -- he blew the money for the Bright Start (college savings) program."

Kirk, with two decades in the Naval Reserves, created his own character questions with misstatements about his past military exploits.

Still, Kirk clearly benefited from the GOP wave washing across the country. While Giannoulias is a close ally of Obama, Kirk stayed closer to the GOP fold. He said the health care bill needs to be replaced, and he stressed that compared to Giannoulias, he would tax less, spend less and borrow less.

Mooney said Kirk's win was important symbolically. But more important, he said, is the fact that Kirk will add another GOP vote to a

closely divided Senate. That impact could be enhanced with the shift of control of the House to Republicans as well.

At the local level, GOP Sheriff Neil Williamson's handy win over Democratic challenger Jeff Regan – the sleeping deputy episode notwithstanding – showed that it's not easy to change the public's perception of a long-time officeholder with a brief public campaign.

The public didn't really get to know Regan, whose advertising got started only recently.

At the legislative level, downstate was affected by the national Republican trend, bolstered by some Tea Party activism.

That helped Republican contractor Sam McCann overcome state Sen. Deanna Demuzio in the historically Democratic 49th state Senate District.

The theme? Democrats favor Chicago; they've controlled the legislature for eight years; and they've run the state into the ground.

Also riding that wave was state Rep.-elect Wayne Rosenthal, Republican of Morrisonville.

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