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Brady concedes, Quinn claims mandate

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CHICAGO — Gov. Pat Quinn's quest to become the elected leader of Illinois was fulfilled Friday when his Republican challenger conceded the state's closest governor's race in decades, leaving Quinn to argue he has a mandate to push a tax increase in the face of one of the nation's worst state budget problems.

Quinn defied a national Republican surge that cost many other Democratic incumbents their jobs by defeating state Sen. Bill Brady of Bloomington, but it was far from a resounding victory with just more than 19,000 votes separating the two.

Still Quinn, who has held the office since replacing ousted Gov. Rod Blagojevich in January 2009, says he'll continue arguing for an income tax increase to deal with a budget shortfall that could soon reach \$15 billion and already has forced the state to stop paying some of its bills.

"I have a mandate, I think, to serve Illinois for the next four years, and I'm going to take that seriously and work hard on the issues that I espoused in the campaign. ... I think there are those who understand the election returns gave us a lot of support, and that will help us get the votes in the legislature to do challenging but very important things," Quinn said Thursday.

Quinn beat the socially conservative Brady by earning overwhelming support in the city of Chicago and solid support among those from households with less than \$100,000 income, labor union households and those with family members who had lost jobs in the last two years.

He survived the politically risky strategy of campaigning on a proposal to raise the state income tax, but there's no guarantee lawmakers will go along with an idea they've rejected in the past. The plan also would raise only about \$2.8 billion a year for education, leaving the rest of the deficit to be defrayed by so-far unspecified budget cuts, possible federal aid and the hope of an improving economy.

Then there's the partisan politics that have paralyzed the Illinois Legislature and show no sign of letting up — not even the Democrats who control the General Assembly can agree on increasing taxes or making deep budget cuts.

Brady said during his Friday concession speech in his hometown that he wanted to work with Quinn and his legislative colleagues after the "bitter" election, but that cooperation apparently has its limits.

"I'm committed and continue to believe that we cannot raise taxes on the backs of the hardworking families of the state of Illinois," said Brady, who campaigned on a pledge not to raise taxes.

Quinn said Friday that he and Brady plan to have lunch soon to "work together for the common good" of Illinois. He suggested Manny's deli, a downtown Chicago eatery popular with politicians.

The enormous challenges facing Quinn were evident earlier this week when the Illinois Senate put off a vote he wants on a borrowing plan that would pay the state's badly underfunded pension system.

Republican legislative leaders said Quinn shouldn't think he has a mandate from voters with a half-percentage point margin in an election where 3.6 million ballots were cast.

"Gov. Quinn represents all of the people of Illinois, including the people who voted for him and the ones who didn't vote for him," said Sara Wojcicki, a spokeswoman for Illinois House Republican leader Tom Cross.

Senate Republican leader Christine Radogno said she doesn't know whether Quinn can get a tax increase through the Legislature — where even Democrats have been split on the idea — because many lawmakers campaigned on pledges of fiscal discipline, not tax increases.

"We are not going to compromise away our principles. He's going to have to compromise with us," she said.

It will be up to Quinn to persuade lawmakers that his election provides him with more political leverage, considering the closeness of the race, said Chris Mooney, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Quinn disagrees.

"I've said all along we need revenue for education, in particular, in Illinois, and by winning the election I think that is support for us to do exactly that," he has said.

Quinn got the freedom to move ahead with his agenda after Brady conceded Illinois' closest governor race since 1982, when incumbent Republican Jim Thompson defeated Democrat Adlai E. Stevenson by 5,074 votes. It was another close win for Quinn who eked out a narrow primary win in February after heavy criticism of an early-release program that let more than 1,700 inmates out of prison early to save money.

"When push comes to shove he has shown himself to be the best closer in Illinois politics," Mooney said.

Associated Press writers David Mercer in Bloomington and Karen Hawkins in Chicago contributed to this report.

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