

Stoltzfus to step down as GOP leader

Both Democratic and Republican Senate caucuses brace for change

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by Thomas Dennison
Staff writer

ANNAPOLIS — Senate Minority Leader J. Lowell Stoltzfus will not run for re-election as Republican leader when the General Assembly reconvenes in January, proving that the GOP and Democratic caucuses will experience significant post-election upheaval.

“I’m not as interested in the leadership role as I used to be,” said Stoltzfus (R-Dist. 38) of Westover, who has been minority leader since 2001. “I’m not going to be leader next year. I’m not going to run.”

Stoltzfus’ decision to step down as leader of the 14-member GOP caucus adds an additional layer to the Senate’s turnover that has seen 10 of 47 senators defeated or retired as of last week. Republicans and Democrats are pushing hard to pick up seats in November, raising the possibility of more turnover.

Lobbyists and insiders have been buzzing that the Senate — considered more conservative than the House of Delegates — may have a new, more liberal tilt after last week’s primaries.

Jamie Raskin, a lawyer from Takoma Park, and James C. Rosapepe, a former ambassador to Romania and a former delegate, defeated Senate President Pro-Tem Ida G. Ruben (D-Dist. 20) of Silver Spring and John A. Giannetti Jr. (D-Dist. 21) of Laurel, respectively, by running as liberal insurgents. In southern Prince George’s County’s District 26, the Rev. C. Anthony Muse is considered as someone willing to shake things up.

Rosapepe is considered more liberal than Giannetti, who was attacked in the primary for his pro-life and pro-gun positions.

Raskin is an unapologetic liberal, and is promising to be more energetic than Ruben, a senator for decades who rarely goes against the leadership. Raskin said he is looking forward to being a productive senator and realizes that his freshman status means he will be learning more than leading early on.

“I have many strongly held passions and beliefs, but I’m a pragmatist and I understand that the art of democracy is compromise,” Raskin said. “I hope to bring my idealism and my pragmatism to work with me every day.”

Raskin attributed his victory as part of a “liberal revival” in the Democratic Party. “I’m proud to be called liberal and proud to be part of a liberal revival,” he said.

The words “liberal revival” make Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. — whose politics are driven by his down-home, conservative, pro-business roots — a little queasy. Miller, whose more than two decades as Senate president is a national record, is not considered in danger of a coup. In fact, he said, he is looking forward to working with the new crop of senators.

“All of the new members have reached out and I’m very excited about them,” said Miller (D-Dist. 27) of Chesapeake Beach.

Miller supported both Ruben and Giannetti, but said the addition of Raskin and Rosapepe, combined with the retirements of social conservatives Leo Green (D-Dist.

23) of Bowie and Philip C. Jimeno (D-Dist. 31) of Brooklyn Park, does not mean the Senate will move demonstrably to the left.

He acknowledged that political parties are becoming more polarized and the liberal and conservative wings are dominant in primary elections. "Both parties are shifting farther away from one another and that's unfortunate because the majority of people are in the middle," he said. "The Republican Party has shifted farther to the right, and the Democratic Party has shifted farther to the left."

Miller may have supported the incumbents over Raskin and Rosapepe, but he was pleased with several other races. In District 23, Prince George's County Councilman Douglas J.J. Peters is leading in his primary to succeed Green. Peters is considered to have a social conservative bent similar to Green's. Votes were still being counted on Thursday.

Miller was also pleased that Del. Catherine E. Pugh won Baltimore's District 40 to succeed Sen. Ralph Hughes, who retired. Miller backed Pugh's bid over that of Del. Salima Siler Marriot. In Montgomery County's District 19, Mike Lennett, who like Miller is a trial lawyer, is not considered a rabble-rouser.

But Miller is losing some of his key lieutenants. Education Health and Environmental Affairs Chairwoman Paula C. Hollinger (D-Dist. 11) of Owings Mills gave up her seat to run for Congress in the 3rd District and was defeated in last week's primary. That means at least one of the four Senate standing committees will have a new leader.

There is also some talk about Annapolis that Miller may make some other committee switches and shuffle around some subject matter, but nothing definitive has been decided.

Hollinger will be replaced by up-and-coming Del. Robert A. Zirkin (D-Dist. 11) of Owings Mills who trounced his Democratic primary opponent. Green's retirement frees up the vice chairmanship of the Judicial Proceedings Committee and the chairmanship of the Rules Committee.

Ruben's defeat means there will be an open seat on the Budget and Taxation Committee, which is likely to be filled by Del. Richard S. Madaleno Jr. (D-Dist. 18) of Kensington, a budget expert who is expected to win the Senate seat being vacated by Sharon M. Grosfeld (D) of Kensington.

Stoltzfus' decision to step down as minority leader will spark a leadership race within the GOP caucus. Minority Whip Andrew P. Harris (R-Dist. 8) of Cockeysville, E.J. Pipkin (R-Dist. 36) of Stevensville and David R. Brinkley (R-Dist. 4) of New Market have all been talked about for the job.

Stoltzfus did not endorse for a successor. "It's up to the caucus to decide."

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