



What Just Happened? What Does It Mean for Public Schools?

This has been a remarkable election. And while I wish I could say that it is all over now, it certainly is not. The uncertainty caused by numerous states moving quickly to expanded early voting and relaxing requirements on mail-in ballots, at times even changing the rules mid-election, has left us with a situation where it may be weeks or longer before we feel comfortable with knowing how the electoral votes will be apportioned. Recounts and court challenges are understandably being advanced and while they should all be resolved by December 14 when electors vote, the [Congressional Research Service](#) reports that Senator Rubio and Representative David E. Price have introduced legislation to move back the date for electors to vote until January 2 to allow more time to settle the various recounts and court challenges. The only date set firmly in the US Constitution is in the [20th Amendment](#) where it is established that the inauguration of the president must happen at noon on January 20.

Making the election even more interesting is the fact that we still do not know whether the Democrats or Republicans will control the US Senate. Current vote tallies indicate that there is a 50 Republican to 48 Democrat edge with the two US Senators from Georgia to be chosen [on January 5 through runoff elections](#). If Republicans win just one of these two races, they will maintain control of the Senate. The Democrats need to win both races to flip the Senate. The control of the Senate matters to education policy—a lot.

If Biden's electoral edge survives court challenges and recounts and the Democrats control the Senate, we are likely to see a dramatic shift to the left in education policy. The earliest sign of this will be President Joe Biden's nomination of a new secretary of education to replace Betsy

DeVos. [Many have speculated](#) that he will nominate either Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, or Lily Eskelsen Garcia, former president of the National Education Association, to take this position. Such a pick would move the federal education bureaucracy about as far to the left as one could imagine. I agree strongly with union watcher [Mike Antonucci](#) that it is unlikely that Weingarten would take this position as it would mean a \$200,000 pay cut from her [current salary](#). Eskelsen Garcia on the other hand, is currently out of a job, and the [\\$207,800 secretary of education salary](#) plus the prestige, consulting contracts, and paid speaking engagements that would come her way after serving could be a nice replacement for her previous income. However, if Republicans maintain control of the Senate, they will be reluctant to confirm either of these teacher union bosses as secretary of education. It would be much more likely that Biden will then select a more moderate candidate for that position. Other names that have been mentioned include district superintendents Brenda Cassellius of Boston, Denise Juneau of Seattle, William Hite from Philadelphia, and Sonja Santelises of Baltimore, as well as University of Maryland, Baltimore County President Freeman Hrabowski.

Another important position that will swing based on the outcome of the Georgia Senate runoff is chairman of the powerful Senate Education Committee. Senator Lamar Alexander, who is the current chair, opted to not run for reelection. [Education Week](#) reports that if the Senate remains under Republican control, Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina is the next most senior Republican on the committee and therefore top contender for chair. If the Democrats win both Georgia Senate races, they will take control of the committee and Senator Patty Murray of Washington state, as senior Democrat on the committee, could become the chair. Education Week notes that both Burr and Murray voted for the Every Student Succeeds Act which is up for reauthorization, but points out that Murray was one of the writers of ESSA and said, “Good luck finding anyone who thinks Murray will prioritize overhauling a law she helped write.” Burr on the other hand, “has also spoken out against federal mandates in education generally and said parents and local school boards are the best decisionmakers in education.”

Another big story coming out of the election is the huge success that Republicans had in increasing their numbers in the House of Representatives. With only five close races left to be called it appears that the Democrat edge over the Republicans may have been narrowed enough that House Speaker Pelosi will need to listen to the moderates in her party, and we may even see some coalitions emerge that leave the extreme liberal Democrats out of the picture.

My takeaway from this is that at the federal level the yet to be decided balance of power in the Senate will make a major difference. If the Democrats win both pending Senate races in Georgia, we will see a shift toward much more federal control of education with the teacher unions exerting a lot of influence. However, if the Republicans win at least one of the two Georgia Senate seats, things will not change significantly.

Another remarkable outcome of this election is how little things changed at the state and local level. [The National Council of State Legislatures](#) noted that only two state legislative chambers changed hands, both in New Hampshire where Republicans will control both chambers. [The Associated Press](#) reports that only one governor's race switched, and that was in Montana where Representative Greg Gianforte will be the first Republican to serve as governor in sixteen years.

Education ballot initiatives at the state and local level are a [mixed bag](#) with education funding measures in Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah appearing to be passing. However in a big surprise, Californians [defeated Proposition 15](#) which would have raised additional revenues for public education and other government programs. In an even bigger surprise, 57% of Californians voted to [reject Proposition 16](#) which would have allowed the state government and schools to establish affirmative action programs. Could this signal a swing of the Golden State political pendulum toward the middle?

Viewing the presidential race, which is currently projected to go to Vice President Biden, and considering that other races seemed to trend toward the Republicans or at least moderation, four vexing questions arise along with urgent need for prayer:

1. Is it possible that concerns about the character of the president played a big role in the election? Or, to put it another way, did many voters cast their ballots for Republicans down ballot, but did not vote for President Trump? If this is true, in light of the fact that the president has delivered the most pro-life and pro-religious liberty policy agenda, and certainly the most pro-life and pro-religious liberty Supreme Court the country has seen in decades, we must pray that these gains will remain in place without Trump as president. While I am worried about this, I know that I need to place my trust in the Lord. I was reminded last week that Joshua 1:9 might be a good place to start: "Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

2. Is it possible, as some have alleged, that there was some element of fraud involved in a few states in the casting of illegal ballots? The canvassing of ballots and the analysis of ticket splitting may cast some light on this possibility, but this question may never be fully resolved. I hesitate to mention this possibility because I do not want to undercut either our democratic process or the likely presidency of Joe Biden. We must always pray that our leaders, whoever they are, will be a blessing to the people and be secure in knowing that the Lord directs their decisions:

“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will” (Proverbs 21:1).

3. Has confidence in our electoral process been irreparably damaged? With many suspicious of the electoral vote count, we should also pray that our republic will continue to receive the Lord’s favor in order to be a blessing to our people and the world, and that our voting systems will be reformed as necessary to ensure that the will of the people is clearly heard. We are not the first nation needing to turn to the Lord and pray for restoration. Psalm 80 could be helpful:

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
stir up your might
and come to save us!
Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved! (Psalm 80:1-3)

4. Has the unity of our churches been harmed by the divisiveness of this election? A good place to start in our prayer for the unity of the church could be with the incredible promise from Jesus in Matthew 16:18:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Please share your thoughts on this column that you would like other readers to see by entering them in the form below. Personal comments can be sent to JMitchell@ceai.org. John Mitchell is on staff at CEAI and teaches part-time in the suburbs of Washington, DC.

© 2020 Christian Educators Association International | www.ceai.org | 888.798.1124
Washington Education Watch 10/2020. Used with permission.