

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **What I saw at the election**

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Being president of a non-partisan organization means that I cannot associate the organization with political candidates or campaigns. I took this a step further by also not doing any official endorsements of any campaign as an individual. However, I did do such activities as an individual as hand out literature for candidates door-to-door and at the polls. Now that the 2006 elections are over, I can also offer commentary on the election. The 2006 election were a watershed for Montgomery County, for Maryland and for the nation. From where I sat from Tuesday noon until poll closing at Garrett Park Elementary School, I saw a lot of well-educated and cordial voters and Democratic Party precinct officials and workers. There were Republican candidate signs, but never any Republican Party precinct officials or workers. Turnout was at least double that of the primary and many voters seemed interested in the Democratic sample ballot.

I'll pass on commenting on the national elections, focusing on the fact that four of the five top state elected positions are now held by Montgomery County residents or county natives: Governor, Comptroller, Attorney General, and Treasurer. Montgomery County's status as the largest jurisdiction in the state is now better reflected in the makeup of Maryland's top elected officials. The new Governor was born and raised in this county, and now lives in Baltimore City, but he spent a lot of time here this year reminding us of his local roots in Bethesda and Rockville. If there had been a Montgomery County "curse" that had prevented county residents from being elected by state voters to statewide offices, it was broken on November 7.

Montgomery County has 46 partisan elected local and state positions. Until yesterday, 44 of those positions were held by Democrats. It looks like Democrats will now control all 46. This appears to reflect a real determination by voters to select a straight Democratic ticket, ending a long-time habit of occasionally crossing party lines in certain parts of the county. For example, in races where voters chose three at-large delegates for each of the eight state legislative districts, three of the districts showed vote differences between the lowest and highest Democratic winners of between 168 and 251 votes out of about 100,000 total votes cast per district. Two of these districts had also favored Republicans as recently as the '90s. There was crossover in other districts, but not enough for any Republicans to win. These numbers will change when provisional and absentee ballots are counted later this week, but it is highly unlikely that the results of more than one race could change.

Most candidates for county office behaved themselves in the weeks leading up to the general election. Some state races were an entirely different matter. A few local contests deserve some singling out for the ways that the candidates crossed the line. One perennial Republican candidate for state and local office, Steve Abrams, further demonstrated his talent for abusing his position as a sitting, nonpartisan school board member for partisan gain. After he lost in the Republican primary for state comptroller, he then muscled aside a winner of the at-large County Council Republican primary, apparently claiming that victory, after 20 years of trying, would be his due to the expected support of a group of voters he called "Duncan Democrats."

His single campaign piece promised that he would "continue the accomplishments of Doug Duncan, Mike Subin and Steve Silverman," never identifying himself as a Republican candidate. He further wrote: "Electing Steve Abrams to the County Council at large and the Board of Education candidates endorsed by The Washington Post is the best way to make sure that the achievements of Superintendent Jerry Weast are continued and be certain that his contract is renewed!" Mr. Abrams, apparently the second highest

Republican vote-getter in Montgomery County after the incumbent Governor, had come within 78,815 votes of winning a seat on the County Council, with more votes still to count. However, put another way, he has received half as many votes as the Democratic winners. Now, Mr. Abrams will return to his dual responsibilities as the school board's #1 cheerleader for the school superintendent and as a member of the Montgomery County Republican Central Committee.

Democrat turned Republican turned Independent Robin Ficker, everyone's favorite gadfly, spent a lot of his own money to get less than 10% of the vote in his latest quixotic effort to regain an elective office, any elective office, since serving one term in the '70s in the House of Delegates. His straight talk about what he would do if elected County Executive, as well as his relentless, even personal criticism of the Democratic candidate, meant that the Democratic winner only received 7 times more votes than Mr. Ficker. What will Mr. Ficker do in 2008 to try to be the center of attention? Do we dare imagine that he might finally give up this hobby of his?

As of Wednesday morning, 267,409 votes had been recorded for Governor; as few as 183,140 had been cast for one contested Board of Education race. This drop off of 84,269 votes - over 31% of the total - is not really due to the placement of school board candidates near the end of the ballot. The constitutional amendment to require state legislative approval for the sale of state lands, placed after the school board races, received 244,676 votes. The drop off continues to represent the long standing disinterest of many county voters that half the county's budget is spent on education; it shows how little concern a substantial number of county taxpayers have about how \$2 billion a year is spent on the operating and capital budgets of MCPS. How many of those who may complain about the county's taxes are included in that 31%?

We have a new County Executive and four new County Councilmembers, a degree of change in these offices that this county has not experienced since 1990. Many county residents have high hopes that these new and familiar faces in these new positions will better manage growth and restore the equilibrium between the government, the people, and those with special interests. Activists also want this, as well as a government that will require its employees to do their jobs well, to interpret laws and regulations in a fair and impartial manner, and to take responsibility for mistakes and to promptly correct them. We also hope that Montgomery County government will put its energy into becoming the best at many things, rather than using its energy to brag about the many things it pretends to be the best at.