

By BRIAN ACKLEY
WIN Columnist

Election post mortems are almost as entertaining as all the pre-vote analysis, except if you live in these parts and already know the outcome of virtually every county, state and federal race before anyone here goes to the polls.

The huge exhale you're hearing isn't just the usual flapping of political gums; that would be political incumbents relieved that their virtual lifetime appointment to office has once again gone unchallenged.

Fueled by a study which called New York's government the most ineffective in the country, pre-election winds were blowing at gale force about reform, about finally forcing elected officials to act on behalf of the voters. The all too easy piling on of politicians was finally going to pay dividends, the optimists predicted.

Proclaimed the *Albany Times Union* in an Oct. 31 pre-vote analysis, "Like a political flu, these sentiments have spread in recent weeks to lawn signs, campaign literature and news conferences. It seems everyone – incumbents, challengers, newspapers, good government groups – is backing government reform."

And, if you believe some, the Nov. 2 ballot was a rousing reform success.

"If Albany's leaders know what is good for themselves and their state, they will take the hints here and there in Tuesday's legislative races and heed the call for 'fixing' the nation's most dysfunctional state government," offered *New York Newsday* in a Nov. 4 editorial. "Voter patience is growing shorter by the day."

Binghamton's *Press and Sun Bulletin* was even more giddy in apparently believing a tidal wave of reform had actually washed over the state. "In a show of anger, New York voters boot some incumbents," they screamed.

One central New York television station even went as far as to exclaim, "Voters slap back at security of incumbency in Albany."

Anger? Slap back? If they know what's good for them? You might just think the revolution was at hand, until Depew's Dale Volker offered his recent assessment of just what might be in store for those who think Albany doesn't quite work the way it should.

"I hate to say it, but it's not fun to mess with Mother Nature, and we're Mother Nature."

The pro-reform New York Public Interest Group was a little more on the mark, terming it another "blowout election" for incumbents. Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi, one of the reform bandleaders and on whom our own Joel Giambra draws much of his bravado, was left with this after polls closed Nov. 2, "Whatever happens tonight, the Fix Albany campaign has succeeded by getting the message of reform out."

Maybe it got out, but nobody cared. *Newsday's* assessment of the Long Island leader's efforts were pretty to the point. "Yesterday, voters delivered their answer to Suozzi's plea for reform -- and to a degree, a verdict on his future -- as two Democratic political newcomers he backed on Long Island failed to unseat a pair of longtime Republican state senators."

On average, over the last three decades, a grand total of 2.7 Albany legislative incumbents lose their seats in any given state election. Put another way, in the last 22 years, a grand total of 30 incumbents have been beaten in seeking re-election.

Since all 212 Albany seats were again up this year, how many incumbents do you think were tossed from office? Thirty? Fifty? One hundred? Just how angry were New York's voters, just how willing were they to make a difference, capitalize on whatever largely perceived reform wave might have been cresting by early November?

The correct answer would be three. That's the slap back, 98.6 percent of those who have helped drive governments everywhere to the brink are heading back to see what additional damage they can do. Which is a perfect percentage because for New York's voters, it's still business as normal.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a paid weekly circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)