



The Business Voice Remains Vital with New Faces in Dover

BY KIM GOMES

IT'S BEEN SAID BEFORE and it will continue to be said well into the future, 2020 was a strange year, for so many reasons. The 2020 Election season was no exception. For starters, Delaware is now the proud home of a President. Perhaps the rest of the country will no longer be asking “Dela-where?” What that actually means to us as a state remains to be seen, but nonetheless, we can count on being more in the spotlight going forward than in the past.

Our trusty Congressional team of Senator Carper, Senator Coons, and Congresswoman Blunt Rochester were easily re-elected. It's anticipated they will continue to travel to DC and do what they do best, represent our state while crossing the aisle and building bridges.

Local races brought about some changes to the legislative landscape. There are four new house members, one as a result of a retirement and three as a result of last September's primary. Despite the addition of four new representatives, there is no change in the make-up of democrats (26) and republicans (15) in the house. Leadership on both sides also remained the same. What has changed, however, is the diversity of the House. We now have eight members of the Black Caucus, the first Muslim representative as well as the first LGBTQ+ member.

There are also four new Senate members, one due to a retirement, one as a result of the September primary, and two as a result of upsetting sitting Republican senators. This now gives the Senate a supermajority

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for voting purposes (14 D's vs. 7 R's). Leadership also changed with a new President Pro Tempore, Majority Leader, and Majority Whip. The Senate Republicans lost their only female member, and the Democrats gained the highest-ranking elected transgender person in the country. The Senate Democrats now have seven women and seven men. The diversity of the Senate changed as well, there are now three African American members.

Both houses are now far more progressive than they were last session. We fully expect to see an attempt to move a progressive agenda tackling issues such as increased minimum wage, paid family leave, gun legislation, recreational marijuana, green new deal, and general environmental as well as environmental justice issues. To the extent the business community is not aligned with those agenda items, this will mean a call to action to speak your position. That specifically means educating the legislators that represent the area in which your business sits. This also means potentially creating a grassroots effort within your organization to make sure those policies for which you agree and disagree have well thought out supporting or opposing points. While the State Chamber has a strong voice in Dover, it will never compare to the voice of those directly affected; those in your organizations!

Dover is not nearly as scary of a place as some folks may believe it to be. The Delaware General Assembly genuinely likes to hear from our business community. It can be easy to forget our elected officials are not subject matter experts in all areas. We elect them and then expect they will go to Dover and work on our behalf. However, if they are not aware of what that means to you and your business, it becomes very hard for them to do that. We saw massive increases in the number of citizens that chose to exercise their rights and their civic duty in the form of mail-in or in-person voting in the 2020 election. I highly recommend our business community follow suit by staying involved and voicing your opinion in the form of well-constructed policy. ■



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