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Greg Ballard wins 2nd term as Indianapolis mayor

But Democrats seize control of council. Can they work together?

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Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard's re-election victory benefited from thousands of crossover votes. But in giving him a vote of confidence, those Democrats, along with some independent voters, handed him what may become the greatest challenge of his second term: split government.

The mayor who has counted on a friendly Republican-led City-County Council— key to the city's utilities sale, controversial spending decisions and Ballard's parking meter privatization deal — now will face a decisive majority of Democratic faces on the 29-member body.

Democrats won all four at-large council seats Tuesday, seizing on the party's increasing advantage among Marion County voters.

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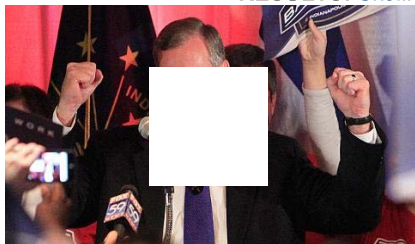
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Mayor Greg Ballard celebrates winning 2nd term: Greg Ballard celebrates winning his 2nd term as mayor of Indianapolis.



Mayor Greg Ballard celebrates a close win Tuesday at the Murat Theatre at Old National Centre. He enjoyed crossover support from Democratic voters to earn a second term in office. / MIKE FENDER / The Star

What about the mayor's agenda for a second term?

Mayor Greg Ballard said his vision for a second term is to reach across international borders to boost the local economy and attract new employers, as well as grow local businesses. He plans to open resource centers to help accomplish both.

Ballard hopes to bolster development by continuing to leverage public dollars and incentives to attract private investment -- from large projects, such as the CityWay development near Eli Lilly and Co.'s campus and the emerging 16 Tech life-science corridor at the former Bush Stadium, to smaller ones, such as the redevelopment of a block of Massachusetts Avenue and a parking garage in Broad Ripple.

And transit looms on the horizon, emerging as one of the biggest issues facing Central Indiana. Ballard said he must be convinced that a private-sector task force's plan would aid economic development. If so, he would lobby for the General Assembly to authorize a referendum asking voters if they want to raise taxes to expand IndyGo and add rail lines.

And, of course, expect more construction cone zones. Ballard will continue spending via his \$425 million RebuildIndy program -- perhaps his first term's signature initiative.

How did he win?

With an increasingly Democratic electorate in Marion County, just how did Ballard grasp victory? He ran on his record, touting nuts-and-bolts management over soaring vision.

His fiscal conservatism became a selling point, with Ballard pointing out that property and county income tax

Nonetheless, Ballard beat Democratic challenger Melina Kennedy by 4 percentage points. And he led the Republican ticket, besting the GOP council at-large slate by 13,000 votes.

It's only the second time split government has come to Marion County in the four decades since Uni-Gov extended Indianapolis city limits to the county line. And it's only the second time in that period that Democrats have won council control; the party lost control after a single term when Ballard and the Republicans swept into office four years ago.

The new dynamic is the opposite of the one faced by Democrat Bart Peterson, who was elected along with a Republican council in 1999.

"There will be some fights over the police. There will be fights over education," said Brian Vargus, a political science professor at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. "There will be fights over anything that has to do with city involvement in social issues, in any way, shape or form."

But Ballard savored his victory Tuesday night. The retired Marine lieutenant colonel and onetime political novice was ebullient, raising his voice nearly to a shout as he took the stage at the Murat Theatre at Old National Centre to chants of "Four more years!"

"We did it again!" yelled a jubilant Ballard, raising his arms. "The voters agreed with us."

Later, he told The Indianapolis Star, "People see the progress in this city on a number of fronts. It wasn't one or two things. People see the overall progress in the city."

About his re-election, he said during his speech: "This is one of the greatest honors of my life."

Ballard's victory not only blocked what might have been a huge day for Democrats but also thwarted what would have been a historic victory for Kennedy, who was seeking to become the city's first female mayor.

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Greg Ballard celebrates his win



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rates were lower than when he took office. While the credit goes to 2008 statewide property-tax reform, Ballard was one of few mayors to publicly support that effort.

Ballard also secured new cash in tight times by privatizing the city's parking meters and selling its water and sewer utilities. He infused much of the utility proceeds into his \$425 million RebuildIndy program, targeting the city's crumbling infrastructure. Voters couldn't have missed the widespread construction and delays this year, but Ballard bet on them appreciating smoother commutes along major corridors and new pavement in some neighborhoods that hadn't seen road construction in decades.

Ballard also renewed the city's focus on environmentally friendly efforts, including building a bicycle hub at City Market, adding bike lanes, urban gardens and rain gardens, and retrofitting some city buildings to greener standards.

— Chris Sikiach

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During her concession speech, Kennedy said:

"This campaign has been tough. And the mayor and I have often differed, but I always respected his dedication to the city."

Afterward, Ballard — who has faced complaints by some council Democrats that he's not been willing to meet with them — was reluctant to discuss the new dynamic that could require him to alter his approach.

"We'll figure it out," Ballard said. "We get along with everybody. As long as they're willing to talk . . . we'll be fine. We're pretty nice guys. We've got a good heart."

Democrats won the at-large seats, and overall they appeared to gain a 16-13 advantage over Republicans. Republican council member Christine Scales held a slim 39-vote lead in her district race.

The overall outcome, Marion County Democratic Chairman Ed Treacy said, was both "sweet and sour."

His Republican counterpart, Kyle Walker, said: "There needs to be a continuation of the progress that the folks of Indianapolis expect from Mayor Ballard's administration. They'll see that the mayor is perfectly positioned to pick up right where he left off just yesterday."

One of the first battles after the new council is seated Jan. 1 could be over whether to expand the city's smoking ban to cover bars, private clubs and bowling alleys.

While Ballard threatened to veto such a measure in his first term, he's signaled lately that he's open to compromise, as long as veterans halls are exempted. But some Democrats may object to granting any exemptions.

Ballard and the new council majority have nearly two months to forge a working relationship.

"There's a chance, if everyone gets political, that the city could stall," said council President

Ryan Vaughn, who won re-election but will return to the minority. "But I tend to believe we're better than that."

Democrats still need to pick a president. Outgoing Minority Leader Joanne Sanders chose not to seek re-election, leaving the position

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open.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to really vet issues, to have an opportunity to move our agenda forward," said Democrat Maggie Lewis, who won a second term representing the council's District 7. "I really think there is going to be a difference of asking the public to come back to the City-County Building, because we're elected to serve them."

As potential points of contention moving forward, Vaughn cited the annual budget and how to spend hundreds of millions in remaining proceeds from this year's sale of the water and sewer utilities. Ballard has said he wants nearly all to go to infrastructure improvements, but Kennedy had proposed diverting \$150 million for targeted grant programs.

Political analysts said what might appear to be a recipe for gridlock needn't be so.

And Vargus said tight budget realities due to tax caps and the recession will give Ballard little room to propose big ideas.

"For most people in Indianapolis," Vargus said, "it doesn't matter really who wins, because there is not the resources there to handle the big problems. We can only handle the little ones for now and hope the economy picks up."

"Fundamentally," he added, improving the city's economic prospects "will come down to getting some of the land that's off the tax rolls back on through economic development, and it's going to be tough to do."

Margaret Ferguson, also a political science professor at IUPUI, said Ballard will still have control over his agenda. He just might have to tweak his approach.

"Especially given how nasty the mayor's race has been," Ferguson said, "he's going to have to do some fence-mending. He probably is going to have to do some moderating of positions."

But in the end, she said, "the mayor's in a better position to set the agenda than individual members of the City-County Council, so it doesn't mean that (Democratic control) derails his agenda entirely."

In the end, voters may benefit most from split government, which will make it in both sides' interest to find common ground on contentious issues.

"It often doesn't end up being that bad for the public officials," Ferguson said. "It could end up being a conciliatory situation.

"Sometimes it even ends up benefiting the public during difficult times."

**Star reporter Mary Beth Schneider contributed to this story.
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