

The Star-Ledger

Gov. Murphy upbeat about Democrats, despite possible losses

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NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and The Star-Ledger

Published Nov. 5, 2019

In front of an upbeat crowd Tuesday night, Gov. Phil Murphy praised local Democrats' ability to "compete all over the state."

"The party's never been in a better place," the Democrat said during an Election Night speech at a Somerville restaurant.

However, Democrats may lose several state Assembly seats and a state Senate seat in Tuesday's legislative elections if the voter count numbers hold up, though the Associated Press said several key contests were too close to call as of 11:45 p.m. Late mail-in votes and provisional votes were not counted Tuesday.

The more than 70 people who crowded around Murphy and his wife, First Lady Tammy Murphy, celebrated a host of local elections that either trended blue or remained close.

Murphy cautioned that many races were on the "knife's edge" and that it might be days before all votes could be counted.

Tuesday's elections came halfway through Murphy's first term. All 80 seats in the Assembly were up for grabs, although Democrats will keep their grip on the state Legislature's lower house, where they currently hold 54 spots.

The governor spoke after 10 p.m. He entered with John Currie, chairman of the party's state committee, and shared the microphone with local officials who celebrated Democratic gains in a region that has traditionally elected many Republicans.

Local candidates and campaign workers remained cautiously optimistic about their party's chances. Somerville Mayor Dennis Sullivan showed off a 1994 newspaper article he kept folded in his jacket pocket, bearing the headline "Somerville goes Democratic."

Earlier in the night, Murphy's chief of staff, George Helmy, tweeted that Democrats had flipped the mayor's offices in Dumont, Hamilton, and Bergenfield.

Margaret Weinberger, president of the Somerset County Federation of Democratic Women, said she believed Republican President Donald Trump was fueling a broader surge in Democratic votes.

"Donald Trump is the gift that keeps on giving," Weinberger said.

Murphy said he was glad to see a high number of mail-in ballots — he signed a law in August making it easier for people to vote by mail — and said that he hoped the state could find ways to make it even easier to vote.

Turnout is usually lower without national or gubernatorial races happening at the same time, and the governor's approval rating has hovered in the 40s. But the state continues to trend blue and registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by almost 1 million.

NJ Advance Media staff writer Brent Johnson contributed to this report.