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**Springfield lovefest: State Senate gives Obama a fond farewell**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD -- U.S. Sen.-elect Barack Obama's rising political star flew over the Illinois Senate Monday as he stopped to offer his former colleagues a fond farewell and was met by a standing ovation from Democrats and Republicans alike.

"I think all of us take away a little piece of each other and we end up having a broader worldview that, hopefully, will serve us well as we continue to do this important work," Obama told senators. "I'm going to miss everybody here tremendously."

The Hyde Park Democrat will succeed retiring GOP Sen. Peter Fitzgerald in January after clobbering Republican Alan Keyes in the most lopsided U.S. Senate contest in state history.

Before saying goodbye, Obama worked the Senate chamber as if he were still on the campaign trail, mugging for photographs with Democratic senators, hugging staffers and offering up hearty handshakes to many of his colleagues.

**'Proudest moment'**

Before passing a resolution congratulating Obama, Senate President Emil Jones (D-Chicago) sounded like a father bragging about his son's feats in a speech from the Senate floor.

Jones, who helped shepherd Obama's political career, said his "proudest moment in politics" came when watching Obama last summer deliver a riveting keynote address at the Democratic National Convention that made him a national sensation.

"I'm proud to see him go," Jones said. "But I hate to see him leave."

Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson (R-Greenville), who clashed with Obama during policy debates during the seven years they served together, praised the senator's work while dishing out some friendly advice.

"Keep your feet on the ground. If you need any humility, you know where you can find it," the Senate GOP leader said, "right here in the Illinois Senate."

Prior to the doings on the Senate floor, Watson seemed less than enamored with Keyes' hint after the election that he intends to remain a presence in Illinois and help rebuild the state GOP.

"Obviously, we have some problems in the Republican Party. If Alan Keyes wants to be part of the solution -- key word, solution -- then I'd welcome that. But if it's going to be more divisiveness, then I don't think that's what we need or want," Watson said.

Obama's appearance in Springfield marked a day of transition.

Sitting in Obama's old Senate seat was his newly appointed successor, Kwame Raoul. And also making the rounds was the man Obama is replacing, who pondered his contributions as a crusader against government waste and corruption.

"My legacy, I hope, is I did everything in the power of one man to clean up a sordid political culture in Illinois," Fitzgerald said. "I hope those in the newsrooms in the state can keep that legacy alive and keep it an enduring legacy."