A new era of Chicago politics dawned today as Rahm Emanuel, the former White House chief of staff and the city’s mayor-elect, hugged, shook hands and high-fived surprised rush-hour commuters on the South Side.

Emanuel, elected yesterday with 55 percent of the vote, greeted residents during a brief visit to a train station on a subfreezing Chicago morning.

“I am very energized by the support we received last night throughout the city and the opportunity to turn the page and start anew with a fresh beginning,” said Emanuel, who in May will replace Richard M. Daley, retiring from leading the nation’s third-largest city for the past 22 years.

Emanuel beat a field of six. Chicago’s first Jewish chief executive faces a declining population, city pension shortfalls and a 2012 budget deficit forecast at more than $600 million.

The mayor-elect, 51, is the first former top aide to President Barack Obama elected to office. He overcame a legal challenge to his residency and questions about his Chicago pedigree, and by getting more than 50 percent of the vote, avoided a runoff.

“The test of victory will be whether the children we see today are going to school thinking of their studies rather than their safety and whether their parents are thinking about their jobs rather than struggling to try to figure out how to find a job,” Emanuel said this morning.

The vote marked the approaching end of rule by Daley, 68, who is retiring in May. He and his father, Richard J. Daley, ran Chicago for 43 of the past 55 years.

Broad Support

Emanuel’s campaign drew support from each of the city’s main racial and ethnic groups -- blacks, whites and Hispanics -- and that will benefit him, said Dick Simpson, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

“He will still have big challenges working with the city council and dealing with the structural deficit,” Simpson said.

Repeated use of reserve funds to balance budgets led Standard & Poor’s to cut Chicago’s credit rating on Nov. 5 by one level to A+, the fifth highest grade.

Threatening Deficits

“We need to confront a budget deficit that threatens our future, not by burdening Chicagoans and Chicago families with more taxes they cannot afford, but by reinventing city government so city government works for the taxpayers,” said Emanuel, a former aide to President Bill Clinton who worked as an investment banker before serving in Congress.
In a Feb. 8 speech, he called for a spending freeze and $75 million in cuts to tackle Chicago’s financial challenges. He released a six-page plan that outlined $500 million in potential savings through “efficiencies and better use of existing resources.”

The city also must take immediate action to control pension costs, said Emanuel, who will face tense labor relations. His White House role in helping Clinton win passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement and comments he made about unions as Obama’s top aide left lingering resentment.

“They are particularly unhappy with his call for a more vigorous debate of the number of employees and residency requirements,” Simpson said. “There are going to be battles between him and the unions.”

‘Shared Sacrifice’

During the campaign, Emanuel was more vocal than other candidates in his calls for “shared sacrifice” by those who work for the city of 2.7 million people.

“As a Chicagoan and a friend, I couldn’t be prouder,” Obama said in a statement last night. “Rahm will be a terrific mayor for all the people of Chicago.” In his victory speech, Emanuel said he had spoken by phone with both Daley and Obama before taking the stage.

Emanuel beat a field that included Gery Chico, a former Daley chief of staff and one-time Chicago school board president; City Clerk Miguel del Valle; and former U.S. Senator Carol Moseley Braun. Chico, 54, was Emanuel’s nearest rival with about one-quarter of the vote.

“He knows less about the details of city government than, say, Gery Chico or Miguel del Valle,” Simpson said. “He will have a learning curve, although he understands how government and the executive branch work.”

Council Challenge

Emanuel is likely to face a City Council that’s more autonomous than Daley dealt with in the latter part of his two-decade tenure.

“I want to reach out tonight to the members of the next City Council,” he said. “We have a chance for a new partnership that will serve our city and its taxpayers well.”

That partnership could be immediately strained, said Alan Gitelson, a political science professor at Loyola University Chicago.

“He’s going to have problems starting on Wednesday morning,” Gitelson said.

In a televised debate last week, Emanuel said Alderman Edward M. Burke, a Chico supporter and chairman of the finance committee, could lose his police bodyguards, driver and potentially his chairmanship.

His relationship with Burke will be a “major problem” for Emanuel, said Gitelson, who noted that Burke is the council’s longest-serving member.
Daley Control

About a third of the current aldermen have Daley to thank for appointing them to their posts as he filled spots triggered by resignation or corruption convictions, Simpson said.

There will be at least 20 new members of the 50-alderman City Council after the April 5 runoff election, Gitelson said, an influx that has the potential to be a “counterforce to the mayor.”

Emanuel raised $10.6 million through Jan. 19, four times as much as Chico, campaign disclosure records show. Since then, Emanuel has raised at least an additional $1.4 million.

The new mayor could use any of his remaining campaign resources to win aldermanic allies by helping them in their own potential runoffs, Gitelson said.

“He’s going to have a fair bit of money left over from his war chest,” he said. “That solidifies allegiance to the mayor.”

A fight over Emanuel’s residency dominated the campaign in December and January. A week before early voting began Jan. 31, Emanuel’s name was off the ballot after an appellate court ruled that he didn’t meet a residency requirement.

The Illinois Supreme Court put him back on by unanimously ruling Jan. 27 that Emanuel, who had moved to Washington in 2009 to work for Obama, satisfied the law.

Staying Cool

Emanuel remained composed in public before the election, not showing what he has acknowledged to be a sometimes expletive-laced, explosive personal style.

In 1989, the last time there was a competitive mayoral election, 68 percent of registered voters cast a ballot, records from the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners show. In yesterday’s contest, fewer than half the city’s 1.4 million registered voters cast ballots.

Daley didn’t formally endorse any of the candidates, though he has a long relationship with Emanuel, who worked as a fundraiser on Daley’s first successful mayoral campaign in 1989.

The current mayor is on a sailing vacation this week in the British Virgin Islands, the Chicago Sun-Times reported. Jodi Kawada, a spokeswoman, said she didn’t know his whereabouts.

“I expect the way Emanuel will govern will very much be a continuation of the way that Daley governed,” said John Brehm, a political scientist at the University of Chicago.

Emanuel celebrated Daley’s leadership in his remarks last night.

“This city bears his imprint,” Emanuel said, “and he has earned a special place in our hearts and our history.”