

August 2010

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Is a Conservative Legislature a Bridge Too Far?

The trouble with our liberal friends is not that they're ignorant: It's just that they know so much that isn't so.
--Ronald Reagan

It happens every other year in even-numbered years. All 98 Washington State House seats and one-half of the State Senate seats—25 this year—are up for renewal. More to the point, the party that winds up with at least 50 seats in the House and 25 seats in the Senate on November 2 will set the legislative agenda for the next two years. But with Democrats currently leasing 70 percent of the parking spaces in Olympia, is a Republican takeover in Olympia a bridge too far?

For Republicans to wrest control from Democrats in the forthcoming 62nd legislative session, they must add no less than 20 seats to their numbers—13 in the House and seven in the Senate. That would be a sea change that few are predicting. But national polls do indicate that independent voters are window shopping at Republican outlets in record numbers at the moment, not to mention the awakened non status quo Tea Party movement.

We heard that in usually placid Sequim where lunch followed by shuffleboard is considered a busy day, close to 500 locals recently showed up at the Boys and Girls Club to interact with local candidates. It could be that the fall elections are the Republicans' to lose.

HOUSE DEMOCRATS currently own and operate the state house 61-37. This allows them to lose up to 11 seats but still elect the next Speaker of the House plus rule all of the legislative committees come January. Even so, Democrats aren't napping. An unusual number of their seats (13) have recently become vacant due to unexpected retirements or members running for other office.

Based on Primary Election results, we figure that 39 Democrat house members can expect to be easily re-elected. Adding eight more of their open seats to the "pretty likely" column brings Democrats to 47—three BIG seats shy of a ruling majority in the House of Representatives.

HOUSE REPUBLICANS, unlike their opponents, must retain all 37 seats they now control plus pry loose 13 more from Democrats to get to the magic number 50. Can they do it?

AS WE SEE IT

In Legislative District 1 (LD-1), the Bothell area, both recent "D" seats are vacant and may well be "toss-ups." Republicans Dennis Richter (position 1) and Heidi Munson (position 2), together drew over 50 percent of the votes cast in their district. For discussion, we are tossing them in the GOP bucket. In LD-6 former Rep. **John Ahern** should easily win his old seat back from one-term John Driscoll (D-Spokane) who staged an upset two years ago in the otherwise reliable Republican legislative district. Make that three pickups for the "Rs."

LD-17 looks like a two-seat pickup for Republicans. Incumbent Tim Probst (D-Vancouver) will likely be retired in November, falling 47-53% to Republican challenger **Brian Peck** in the Primary. Peck will be joined by fellow newcomer **Paul Harris** (Pos 2) who blew away his Democrat Primary opponent 56-33%. Maybe the Rs have five to look at?

In LD-25, it's a contest between David and Ms. Goliath. **Hans Zeiger**, a twenty-something Hillsdale College grad, thinks he can topple the seasoned incumbent Rep. Dawn Morrell (D-Puyallup). Who knows?

In our "surprised if not ecstatic" category, are two seats in Tacoma's LD-28 where longtime pro-family attorney **Steve Oban** (R-University Place) is in a dead-heat with incumbent Troy Kelley (D-Lakewood). For position 2, **Paul Wagemann** (R-Lakewood) could conceivably cobble together enough votes from his defeated but like-minded republican challengers to knock off incumbent Tami Green (D-Tacoma) who failed to reach 49 percent in the August 17 vote. Add these two in as well.

Another surprise contest is in Southwest Washington's LD-35. Rep. Kathy Haigh (D-Shelton) may be in trouble. She leads **Daniel Griffey** (R-Allyn), her Republican challenger, by fewer than 240 votes at the moment. The fact that the 35th is a solid Democrat district, we would have to say this race is very close to "leaning Republican." Close doesn't count, but we're putting it in the "R" column anyway.

Vincent Buys, LD-42, grabbed an amazing 52 percent of the Primary vote placing him in position to retire incumbent Kelli Linville (D-Bellingham). **Kevin Haisting**, LD-45, also looks strong at 50 percent. But in LD-44, **Bob McCaughan** (R-Snohomish) who looks good on paper against Hans Dunshee (D-Snohomish), another powerful incumbent who failed to harness more than 48 percent of his district's Primary vote, the \$2,127 raised in the McCaughan campaign compared with \$96,600 for Dunshee is a reality check.

A challenger who is doing well in both the vote and the money chase, however, is **Mark Hargrove** (R-Covington). He is well on track to retire the very troubled incumbent Geoff Simpson in LD-47.

Meanwhile, SENATE DEMOCRATS currently hold 31 seats in the state senate with 19 up for election. At this point at least 13 seats will remain solid for Democrats since most are in or near metro Seattle where more Sasquatch are sighted than Republicans. Still, five of the races are open and Republicans are certainly giving them a heave-ho.

SENATE REPUBLICANS lease only 18 office spaces in Olympia at the moment and six are up for renewal. Not a problem. But they want to remodel and have spotted seven additional spaces with a better view that would bring about a 25-24 Republican Senate majority.

MORE CLOSE RACES TO WATCH...GET INVOLVED IN

LD-6 voters appear poised to cash-out incumbent Sen. Chris Marr (D-Spokane) and hire **Michael Baumgartner** (R-Spokane). On the West side, LD-30 longtime powerhouse Sen. Tracey Eide (D-Des Moines) has encountered a pit bull in **Tony More** (R-Federal Way) who was only a point down in the Primary.

Mercer Island's **Steve Litzow**, LD-41, found 76 more votes than his incumbent Democrat opponent, and former Sen. **Dave Schmidt** (R-Everett) in LD-44 edged ahead of his incumbent Democrat opponent by 135 votes. Would we call both races "leaning Republican?" Absolutely!

And, finally, Republicans **Andy Hill** in LD-45 (Redmond) and **Joe Fain**, LD-47 (Covington) posted huge Primary wins that should attract fresh cash to their invigorated campaigns. But 17, 18 or even 19 seats will not return conservative practices to state government in Olympia. Only 20 seats will start the clock again.

In 1994 when Republicans crossed the Red Sea, 30 seats were exchanged between the two parties—27 in the House and three in the Senate. For that to happen again, all hands in the conservative boat must take an oar. The decisive votes must be mined from family, friends, and neighbors who normally don't follow politics too closely, seldom bother to vote in the midterms, but sense that something is going terribly wrong.

On the lighter side, a few reading this remember Will Rogers who quipped, "If we got one-tenth of what was promised to us in these acceptance speeches there wouldn't be any inducement to go to heaven."

Rick Forcier