

## **Eyeing the Political Landscape**

*By Denise Graham*

*Manager of Government Affairs, APIC*

September 9, 2004—With all eyes on the race for the White House, many key state races are being overlooked as the two major parties battle for control. The Democrats and Republicans are at a near-perfect stalemate for control of the states, and the 2004 election question is, “Will one party prevail?”

Nearly 80 percent of the nation’s 7,382 state legislative seats are up for grabs in November in the 44 states with regularly scheduled elections. There are no general elections in Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Virginia-and no regular Senate elections in Michigan and Minnesota. In all other states, it is an election year, when televisions are barraged with campaign advertisements and lawns are sprinkled with signs of support.

In terms of controlling state legislatures, there is parity between the two parties, with the Republicans controlling 21 legislatures, Democrats controlling 17, and 11 being split. Republicans continue to fight to hold onto their slim majority of legislative seats which they achieved in 2002. Democrats are fighting in hopes of bouncing back from a 50-year low.

If you reside in Oregon and North Carolina, then you are experiencing the greatest of legislative battles. These two states are under a political watch for a possible party control shift. The Oregon Senate and the North Carolina House top every list of key places to watch for a possible party control shift. Political forecasts show that on average, 12 legislative chambers have changed hands during every two-year election cycle dating back to 1938. It is predicted that this cycle will shape up to be right on the average.

Political forecasters list six chambers as toss-ups for control when legislatures convene next January. They are the Indiana House, North Carolina House, Vermont House, Washington House, Maine Senate, and Washington Senate. A shift of three or fewer seats in these states will upset control. Additionally, forecasters recommend watching the senates in Colorado, Georgia, Oregon, and the Oklahoma House.

The races for governor in 2004 are lackluster with 11 states electing governors this year, four of which are open seats without an incumbent in the race. Like legislatures, the gubernatorial split is almost even with 28 Republicans and 22 Democrats.

Lastly, references are made to political coattails, with some political forecasters questioning whether they really matter. Considering that over the past 64 years, there have been 16 presidential elections, and the party of the person winning 11 of these 16 elections gained seats in state legislatures, it seems that presidential coattails really do matter.

As Americans, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to exercise our right to vote. APIC encourages you to take the time to exercise your right on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, regardless of the party you choose to support.