

Princeton Public Affairs Group

2003 Election Analysis & Legislative Update

Democrats Capture Full Control of Legislature

In one of the most contentious elections in recent memory, Democrats took control of the State Senate and expanded their majority in the General Assembly. Historically, the party in control of the Governor's Office loses seats in the mid-term elections. New Jersey Democrats reversed this trend, just as Republicans did at the federal level last year. With control of both houses of the legislature at stake, Democrats and Republicans shattered all previous fundraising records by bringing in more than \$40 million. Democrats enjoyed a 3-to-1 fundraising advantage. Voter turnout in mid-term elections has been low in the past and this year was no different, with an estimated 31% of the electorate participating.

State Senate

The unique 20-20 split in the upper house ended as Democrats won control with a two-seat advantage. The most significant race was the upset victory by political newcomer Ellen Karcher, the Marlboro Township Council President, over Senate Co-President John Bennett, a Republican and 24-year veteran of the legislature from the 12th District. Karcher won a decisive victory, capturing 55% of the vote. Her father is the late-Alan Karcher, the former Assembly Speaker in the 1980s.

In the 4th District, former acting State Police superintendent Fred Madden defeated Republican Senator George Geist following a recount of votes. The Democrats set a spending record for New Jersey legislative races to win this seat spending well over \$3 million.

Democrats also won victories in the 36th and 38th districts. In the 36th District, Democratic Senator Paul Sarlo fended off a challenge by former Republican Assemblyman John Kelly. In the neighboring 38th District, freshman Democratic Senator Joe Coniglio won re-election against veteran Republican Assemblywoman Rose Heck.

In the 14th District, Democrats attempt to unseat veteran incumbent Republican Senator Peter Inverso with Anthony "Skip" Cimino, a former Assemblyman and cabinet member in the Florio Administration, was unsuccessful as Senator Inverso was once again re-elected.

General Assembly

In the Assembly, Democrats gained 6 seats to expand their majority to 47. Much of the action occurred in the same districts with competitive Senate races. Riding the coat tails

of Senator-elect Karcher, Democrats Michael Panter and Robert Morgan defeated longtime incumbents Mike Arnone and Clare Farragher in the 12th District. In the 19th District, Assemblywoman Arlene Friscia (a switched from Democrat to Republican this summer) was defeated by Perth Amboy Mayor Joe Vas.

In the 38th District, Democrats Bob Gordon and Joan Voss won both open seats defeating Republicans Louis Tedesco and Ed Trawinski. Assemblyman Matt Ahearn, who left the Democrats to join the Green Party earlier in the year, lost his seat in this race.

In South Jersey, 4th District Republican Assemblyman Steven Altamuro was defeated by Democrat David Mayer. In the 1st District, former Republican Assemblyman Jack Gibson was elected to return to the Assembly and fill the seat vacated by Senator-elect Nick Asselta.

In the 14th District, Republican Bill Baroni was not only the top vote getter but the only Republican in 2003 to unseat a Democratic incumbent (Assemblyman Gary Guear).

Lame Duck and Priorities

The New Jersey Legislature is currently in a period known as “lame duck” – the time from Election Day to the swearing in of the new Legislature. Any bill not signed into law by the Governor prior to noon on January 13, 2004 is dead and, regardless of how far it moved through the legislative process, needs to be reintroduced and sent through the process again.

The Marine Trades Association of New Jersey is currently working in this period to put the finishing touches on legislation to update and improve New Jersey’s boat safety and education laws. While the legislative calendar appears to preclude consideration of a revised bill before the close of the session, we continue to hold meetings and discussions with legislators and staff to ensure that the bill will continue forward in late 2003 and into the new session in 2004.

In addition, we are currently monitoring several other bills, such as Senate Bill 220, that impact upon the marine community in New Jersey. We will be monitoring any activity on this legislation but will also be reviewing the list of “pre-filed” bills introduced for the upcoming session. This list gives an indication of measures from this session that will be proposed for next session and it gives a sense of the type of impact legislators will have on the marine community. Early activity on both positive and negative legislation is critical to protect the interests of marine trades and boaters in New Jersey.