



Money in Politics Research Action Project

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The “Money Party” Wins 91 Percent of Oregon Legislative Races

Fundraising prowess once again proves to be a powerful predictor of Oregon legislative winners. The top money gatherers were the top vote getters in 91 percent of 2004 legislative races.

Chart 1: Fundraising Success and Electoral Wins

Who Won	# of Senate Races	% of 17 Senate Races	# of House Races	% of 60 House Races	# of Legislative Races	% of 77 Legislative Races
Top Fundraiser	16	94%	54	90%	70	91%
Fundraising Underdog	1	6%	6	10%	7	9%

Analysis based on 1st and 2nd general election reporting period contributions and on contributions listed on the two supplemental reports due on 10/25 and 11/1, plus beginning cash balances that reflect money raised by not spent during the primary and available for general election expenditures. Based on Elections Division data, which could change due to auditing and amendments.

The exceptions included three races where the candidates’ status as incumbents gave them the name recognition edge to enable them to overcome their fundraising underdog status. Former state representative Alan Bates moved up to the state Senate in his race against Ashland businessman Jim Wright. Representatives Phil Barnhart and Mike Schaufler regained their seats in the House despite struggling to keep up with their opponents’ large fundraising leads.

In three other races where the financial underdog won, the candidates were able to raise more than 75 percent of their opponents’ totals, granting them an equal opportunity to get their messages out to voters.

All three financial underdog victors had other important advantages over their better-funded opponents. Betty Komp beat out Al Shannon in house district 22, a seat she has run for before. Deborah Boone took advantage of her name recognition as a county commissioner and former chief of staff for the legislator she replaced in her win against Douglas Olson in house district 32. Democrat Larry Galizio faced four opponents, including members of the Republican, Constitution and Libertarian parties, all of whom probably split conservative votes.

Finally, in the race for house district 29, winner and financial underdog Democrat, Chuck Riley, faced incumbent Republican, Mary Gallegos. Libertarian Tom Cox ran a relatively well-funded campaign with the stated goal of blocking Gallegos’ re-election bid.

News reports often focus on the top fundraisers in the most competitive races, which sometimes leaves voters and potential candidates thinking that candidates must raise large pots of money to win elective office. However, while the typical candidate still needed to raise substantial

amounts of money to win – nearly \$59,000 for a House race and more than \$100,000 for a Senate race—the top fundraisers for 2004 House and Senate seats raised nearly six times more.

Chart 2: Typical Winners Fundraising Levels Versus Top Fundraisers

	House Races	Senate Races
Typical Fundraising	\$58,763	\$105,957
Highest Fundraising Campaign	\$323,522	\$612,117

Typical fundraising levels reflect the median contribution amount raised across all candidates for House and Senate, which means that half of the winners in each house raised more and half raised less.

Overall, there was a decided lack of competition among candidates for House and Senate races. More than one in 10 legislative races were won by candidates who were unopposed in their general election bids. Another 56 percent of races had a fundraising spread that was so large that the money underdog was effectively drowned out by the top fundraiser in the race.

That leaves about 30 percent of races where the fundraising underdog was able to raise at least 25 percent of the top fundraiser’s total. Of these, about a third of the underdogs ran in lopsided races, raising more than a quarter but less than half of the top fundraiser’s total. Another third raised struggled to keep up with between 50 and 75 percent of the lead fundraiser’s total. The final third had an equal opportunity to get their messages out to voters, having raised more than 75 percent of their top fundraising opponent’s total.

Chart 3: Final Competition Analysis of 2004 General Election Legislative Races

Competitiveness	# of Senate Races	% of 17 Senate Races		# of House Races	% of 60 House Races		# of Legislative Races	% of 77 Legislative Races	
		24%	65%		10%	70%		13%	69%
Unopposed	4	24%	65%	6	10%	70%	10	13%	69%
Drowned Out	7	41%		36	60%		43	56%	
Lopsided	2		12%	6		10%	8		10%
Struggle to Keep Up	1		6%	7		12%	8		10%
Equal Opportunity	3		18%	5		8%	8		10%

In “Drowned Out” races, fundraising underdogs raised 25 percent or less of the top fundraiser’s total; in “Lopsided” races, fundraising underdogs raised between 25 and 50 percent of the top fundraiser’s total; in “Struggle to Keep Up” races, fundraising underdogs raised between 50 and 75 percent of the top fundraiser’s total; and in “Equal Opportunity” races the fundraising underdogs raised more than 75 percent of the top fundraiser’s total. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Although a post-election disclosure report will show more contributions for the 2004 general election, much of this money is received after the election. Past MiPRAP analysis of these reports suggests that much of the new fundraising reported in this period reflects contributions from entities that previously gave to the winner’s opponent. Post-election contributions are given more to increase the donor’s access to the candidate than from a desire to make the candidate more competitive.

To view the complete competition analysis by House and Senate race, please go to our website at <http://www.oregonfollowthemoney.org/ElectionSummary/2004/2004election.html>.

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