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Memorandum

TO: Representative Max Gruenberg
FROM: Chuck Burnham, Legislative Analyst
DATE: December 23, 2010
RE: Competition in Alaska Legislative Elections
LRS Report 11.082

You asked us to examine vote returns for legislative elections to determine in which districts the race is effectively decided in the primary because one political party consistently dominates the general election. You were also interested to know the level of competition that exists in the primaries for those districts.

For the purposes of this report, we deem a legislative primary or general election to be uncompetitive if the winner garners at least 65 percent of the vote. We consider districts to be currently uncompetitive if the winner is from one political party and has gained at least 65 percent of votes over at least four of the last five elections cycles, or since the 2000 election.[1] Although these measures are, admittedly, somewhat arbitrary, we believe that deeming districts where one party has consistently enjoyed a nearly two-to-one vote advantage in recent elections to be uncompetitive is a conservative standard. That is, only the least competitive districts will meet this definition.[2]

Overall, our research indicates that legislative elections in Alaska are not typically very competitive affairs. Since 1992, at least 53 of the state's 60 legislative districts have seen elections in which the winner received greater than 65 percent of the vote. Although seven of those districts have had only one such uncompetitive election, 21 have experienced uncompetitive elections in at least 5 of the 10 election cycles since 1992. All told, of the roughly 500 district elections since 1992, at least 220, or 44 percent, were uncompetitive by our standard, including 130 of the 250 (52 percent) such elections since 2000. Of the 220 uncompetitive general elections we identified, the winner of 106 ran unopposed.

Using our strict definition of non-competitive districts, we conclude that recent general elections in 25 districts have been locks for either Democrats (7 House, 1 Senate) or Republicans (14 House, 3 Senate). In the elections that we reviewed, 2010 was the least competitive, with winners in 31 of 50 races receiving at least 65 percent of the vote. Table 1 summarizes results of uncompetitive legislative elections in Alaska since 1992 by party and district.

Given the recent partisan domination of general elections, it seems logical to assume that in legislative elections primaries are where the competition lies. Our research clearly indicates that this in not precisely true in Alaska. We analyzed primary results for the 220 winners of uncompetitive general elections since 1992 and found that in 189 races, or about 86 percent, the winning candidate received at least 65 percent of the vote. However, to say that each of these candidates "won" their respective primaries is a bit of a misnomer—in 153 of the 189 uncompetitive primaries, the winner ran unopposed. In 71 of the 220 uncompetitive races we identified, the ultimate winner faced no opponent in either the primary or the general election. Table 2 shows the districts, winners and their political party affiliation, the percent of votes earned in both the primary and general elections, and indicates where races were unopposed, for each uncompetitive legislative race in Alaska since 1992.[3]

We hope this is helpful. If you have questions or need additional information, please let us know.

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[1] It is important to note that we did not consider the impact of redistricting following the 2000 Census in this report. Those impacts, for certain districts, were likely substantial. As such, this report is best viewed in terms of the general and recent trend of the level of competition in Alaska legislative elections.

[2] This standard is a strict one, which we readily admit excludes several districts where the political affiliation of their legislators is unlikely to change in the near future. Nonetheless, we believe considering the likelihood of an outcome rather than actual electoral results introduces too great a level of subjectivity for our purposes.

[3] Please keep in mind that any number of factors influences elections that we did not consider in this report. The influence of incumbency, organizational support, campaign finances, and the like cannot be precisely identified for each race we examined, but were likely a factor, to varying degrees, in many.

Table 1: Alaska General Legislative Elections Won with at Least 65 Percent of the Vote, 1992-2010											
Year	**1992**	**1994**	**1996**	**1998**	**2000**	**2002**	**2004**	**2006**	**2008**	**2010**	**Grand Total**
Democrats	8	7	4	10	4	6	6	9	11	13	78
Republicans	5	7	12	18	15	20	15	15	16	19	142
Total	13	14	16	28	19	26	21	24	27	32	220
House Districts											
1				R		R		R	R	R	5
2	D			D			R				3
3	D	D		D			D	D	D	D	7
4	R			R	R		R			R	5
5		D		D							2
6	D		R			R					3
8			R	R							2
10		R	R	R	R	R	R	R			7
11			R		R	R	R	R	R	R	7
12	R	R	R		R	R	R	R	R		8
13							R	R	R	R	4
14			R	R	R				R		4
15	D			D					R	R	4
16						R	R	R	R	R	5
17		R		R		R		R	R	R	6
18						R	R	R	R	R	5
20				R					D	D	3
22	R							D		D	3
23		R		R		D	D	D	D	D	7
24		R		R	R					D	4
25				R			D	D	D	D	5
26				R					D	D	3
27						R					1
28			R	R	R	R	R			R	6
30						R	R	R			3
31			R		R			R	R	R	5
32					R					R	2
33			R	R	R				R	R	5
34		R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	9
35					R	R		R	R	R	5
36						R	R			R	3
37	D	D	D	D	D	D				D	7
38	D	D	D	D		D	D	D	D	D	9
39	D	D		D	D	D		D	D	D	8
40		D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	9
Senate Districts											
A									R		1
B		D								D	2
C									D		1
D				R							1
E						R					1
F	R	R		R		R		R		R	6
G						R	R		R		3
H				D		R		R		R	4
I						R	R				2
J				R							1
L	R			R				D			3
M			R		R				D		3
N						R		R		R	3
O					R				R		2
Q			R		R		R				3
R										R	1
S	D		D		D	D		D		D	6
T				D			D		D		3

Notes: The political affiliation of the election winners and ucompetitive districts are shaded blue and/or marked "D" (Democrat) and shaded red and/or marked "R" (Republican). **Source:** Alaska Division of Elections, *http://www.elections.alaska.gov/er_return.php* .

Table 2: Uncompetitive Alaska Legislative Election Victories, 1992-2010					
District[1]	General Election Winner	Political Party	Percent of Votes[2]	Winner Percent of Votes in Primary	Competitive Primary?
1992					
F	D. Pearce	R	71.5	100.0	No
L	R. Phillips	R	97.2	79.3	No
S	A. Adams	D	99.0	100.0	No
2	B. Grussendorf	D	68.3	78.0	No
3	F. Ulmer	D	69.8	100.0	No
4	B. Hudson	R	68.7	100.0	No
6	C. Davidson	D	96.2	100.0	No
12	M. Hanley	R	73.6	81.3	No
15	K. Brown	D	74.5	84.3	No
22	R. Barnes	R	67.1	100.0	No
37	E. Maclean	D	99.1	68.2	No
38	R. Foster	D	99.2	46.8	Yes (3-way race)
39	L. Hoffman	D	96.6	56.3	Yes
1994					
B	J. Duncan	D	67.9	100.0	No
F	D. Pearce	R	74.6	100.0	No
3	K. Elton	D	65.4	100.0	No
5	J. Mackie	D	95.0	100.0	No
10	J. Green	R	97.1	100.0	No
12	M. Hanley	R	98.0	100.0	No
17	S. Parnell	R	70.3	100.0	No
23	E. Mulder	R	97.3	73.9	No
24	P. Kott	R	74.8	100.0	No
34	J. James	R	72.2	100.0	No
37	E. Maclean	D	72.9	N/A	Write-In D
38	R. Foster	D	98.6	59.2	No
39	I. Ivan	D	75.9	46.7	Yes (3-way race)
40	C. Moses	D	98.7	100.0	No
1996					
M	R. Halford	R	97.6	61.7	Yes
Q	M. Miller	R	78.4	100.0	No
S	A. Adams	D	99.3	100.0	No
6	A. Austerman	R	69.7	100.0	No
8	G. Davis	R	69.0	100.0	No
10	J. Green	R	75.7	100.0	No
11	N. Rokeberg	R	74.4	64.4	Yes
12	M. Hanley	R	69.6	100.0	No
14	T. Martin	R	68.9	100.0	No
28	B. Masek	R	69.6	75.1	No
31	P. Kelly	R	66.5	100.0	No
33	G. Therriault	R	68.8	100.0	No

Table 2: Uncompetitive Alaska Legislative Election Victories, 1992-2010					
District[1]	General Election Winner	Political Party	Percent of Votes[2]	Winner Percent of Votes in Primary	Competitive Primary?
1996 (continued)					
34	J. James	R	78.2	100.0	No
37	R. Joule	D	98.3	65.5	No
38	R. Foster	D	98.2	38.8	Yes
40	C. Moses	D	97.2	100.0	No
1998					
D	J. Torgerson	R	96.5	100.0	No
F	D. Pearce	R	96.2	100.0	No
H	J. Ellis	D	65.2	100.0	No
J	D. Donley	R	80.1	100.0	No
L	R. Phillips	R	96.5	100.0	No
T	L. Hoffman	D	73.5	100.0	No
1	W. Williams	R	95.5	100.0	No
2	B. Grussendorf	D	96.6	100.0	No
3	B. Kerttula	D	82.0	61.2	Yes
4	B. Hudson	R	72.7	100.0	No
5	A. Kookesh	D	96.0	100.0	No
8	G. Davis	R	67.6	100.0	No
10	J. Green	R	96.8	100.0	No
14	L. Murkowski	R	96.5	65.6	No
15	E. Croft	D	69.3	100.0	No
17	J. Cowdery	R	96.3	69.5	No
20	B. Porter	R	96.1	100.0	No
23	E. Mulder	R	60.7	100.0	No
24	P. Kott	R	95.9	100.0	No
25	F. Dyson	R	95.6	100.0	No
26	V. Korhring	R	64.2	100.0	No
28	B. Masek	R	77.7	100.0	No
33	G. Therriault	R	77.0	100.0	No
34	J. James	R	77.3	100.0	No
37	R. Joule	D	98.2	100.0	No
38	R. Foster	D	95.9	52.8	Yes (3-way race)
39	M. Sattler	D	72.2	57.5	Yes
40	C. Moses	D	87.0	58.1	Yes
2000					
M	R. Halford	R	69.8	100.0	No
O	G. Wilken	R	65.1	100.0	No
Q	G. Therriault	R	77.0	100.0	No
S	D. Olson	D	97.3	41.7	Yes (3-way race)
4	B. Hudson	R	93.8	100.0	No
10	J. Green	R	76.8	100.0	No
11	N. Rokeberg	R	72.9	100.0	No

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District[1]	General Election Winner	Political Party	Percent of Votes[2]	Winner Percent of Votes in Primary	Competitive Primary?
2000 (continued)					
12	A. Halcro	R	95.8	66.4	No
14	L. Murkowski	R	96.4	100.0	No
24	P. Kott	R	73.0	73.8	No (3-way race)
28	B. Masek	R	79.2	100.0	No
31	J. Whitaker	R	69.9	100.0	No
32	J. Coghill	R	68.0	100.0	No
33	H. Fate	R	68.0	51.7	Yes (3-way race)
34	J. James	R	95.9	100.0	No
35	J. Harris	R	68.2	73.9	No
37	R. Joule	D	98.2	100.0	No
39	M. Kapsner	D	97.5	100.0	No
40	C. Moses	D	94.4	66.4	No
2002					
E	G. Wilken	R	69.8	100.0	No
F	G. Therriault	R	81.8	100.0	No
G	L. Green	R	76.4	100.0	No
H	S. Ogan	R	92.3	67.5	No
I	F. Dyson	R	76.3	100.0	No
N	B. Stevens	R	96.4	100.0	No
S	L. Hoffman	D	66.8	100.0	No
1	W. Williams	R	94.1	100.0	No
6	C. Morgan	R	97.0	100.0	No
10	J. Whitaker	R	94.5	100.0	No
11	J. Coghill	R	96.8	53.6	Yes
12	J. Harris	R	94.2	47.0	Yes (3-way race)
16	B. Stoltze	R	73.7	100.0	No
17	P. Kott	R	80.9	100.0	No
18	L. Murkowski	R	93.3	53.1	Yes
23	L. Gara	D	94.0	65.2	No
27	N. Rokeberg	R	96.1	76.6	No
28	L. McGuire	R	75.6	60.9	Yes (3-way race)
30	K. Meyer	R	96.4	100.0	No
34	C. Chenault	R	71.1	100.0	No
35	P. Seaton	R	94.4	56.9	Yes (3-way race)
36	G. Stevens	R	97.3	100.0	No
37	C. Moses	D	96.2	100.0	No
38	M. Kapsner	D	97.3	64.5	Yes
39	R. Foster	D	97.6	100.0	No
40	R. Joule	D	97.8	100.0	No

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District[1]	General Election Winner	Political Party	Percent of Votes[2]	Winner Percent of Votes in Primary	Competitive Primary?
2004					
G	L. Green	R	68.0	100.0	No
I	F. Dyson	R	97.0	100.0	No
Q	T. Wagoner	R	77.0	54.8	Yes (3-way race)
T	D. Olson	D	65.0	100.0	No
2	P. Wilson	R	66.2	100.0	No
3	B. Kerttula	D	71.1	100.0	No
4	B. Weyhrauch	R	65.0	100.0	No
10	J. Ramras	R	70.0	55.4	Yes
11	J. Coghill	R	96.9	100.0	No
12	J. Harris	R	95.7	100.0	No
13	C. Gatto	R	67.3	100.0	No
16	B. Stoltze	R	71.5	100.0	No
18	N. Dahlstrom	R	97.7	100.0	No
23	L. Gara	D	69.5	91.8	No
25	E. Croft	D	95.4	100.0	No
28	L. McGuire	R	68.9	100.0	No
30	K. Meyer	R	71.0	100.0	No
34	C. Chenault	R	72.1	100.0	No
36	G. LeDoux	R	78.8	50.6	Yes (3-way race)
38	M. Kapsner	D	97.8	100.0	No
40	R. Joule	D	97.8	100.0	No
2006					
F	G. Therriault	R	68.8	100.0	No
H	C. Huggins	R	68.8	68.6	No
L	J. Ellis	D	95.0	100.0	No
N	L. McGuire	R	65.9	57.0	Yes
S	L. Hoffman	D	68.0	100.0	No
1	K. Johansen	R	94.3	55.7	Yes
3	B. Kerttula	D	95.6	100.0	No
10	J. Ramras	R	92.1	76.3	No
11	J. Coghill	R	69.8	100.0	No
12	J. Harris	R	71.4	64.8	Yes
13	C. Gatto	R	73.0	100.0	No
16	B. Stoltze	R	71.2	100.0	No
17	A. Fairclough	R	71.0	53.4	Yes
18	N. Dahlstrom	R	96.0	62.3	Yes
22	S. Cissna	R	94.3	100.0	No
23	L. Gara	D	96.0	100.0	No
25	M. Doogan	D	70.3	83.1	No
30	K. Meyer	R	94.6	100.0	No
31	B. Lynn	R	95.7	100.0	No

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District[1]	General Election Winner	Political Party	Percent of Votes[2]	Winner Percent of Votes in Primary	Competitive Primary?
2006 (continued)					
34	C. Chenault	R	94.2	100.0	No
35	P. Seaton	R	68.4	100.0	No
38	M. Kapsner	D	97.4	100.0	No
39	R. Foster	D	97.0	100.0	No
40	R. Joule	D	97.8	100.0	No
2008					
A	B. Stedman	R	96.1	100.0	No
C	A. Kookesh	D	68.8	100.0	No
G	L. Menard	R	80.0	100.0	No
M	H. French	D	90.7	100.0	No
O	K. Meyer	R	68.9	100.0	No
T	D. Olson	D	97.8	100.0	No
1	K. Johansen	R	96.5	100.0	No
3	B. Kerttula	D	95.5	88.0	No
11	J. Coghill	R	81.2	100.0	No
12	J. Harris	R	72.2	100.0	No
13	C. Gatto	R	69.9	63.1	Yes
14	W. Keller	R	77.8	100.0	No
15	M. Neuman	R	76.3	64.7	Yes
16	B. Stoltze	R	75.2	71.6	No
17	A. Fairclough	R	80.0	100.0	No
18	N. Dahlstrom	R	97.3	100.0	No
20	M. Gruenberg	D	79.5	87.5	No
23	L. Gara	D	94.1	89.8	No
25	M. Doogan	D	70.0	100.0	No
26	L. Holmes	D	93.5	100.0	No
31	B. Lynn	R	71.0	100.0	No
33	K. Olson	R	67.2	100.0	No
34	C. Chenault	R	72.5	74.3	No
35	P. Seaton	R	66.7	100.0	No
38	B. Herron	D	96.1	54.6	Yes (3-way race)
39	R. Foster	D	97.4	68.6	No
40	R. Joule	D	98.2	100.0	No
2010					
B	D. Egan	D	97.0	100.0	No
F	J. Coghill	R	97.2	100.0	No
H	C. Huggins	R	96.5	100.0	No
N	L. McGuire	R	69.1	100.0	No
R	G. Stevens	R	96.9	100.0	No
S	L. Hoffman	D	97.3	100.0	No
1	K. Johansen	R	67.5	100.0	No

Table 2: Uncompetitive Alaska Legislative Election Victories, 1992-2010					
District[1]	General Election Winner	Political Party	Percent of Votes[2]	Winner Percent of Votes in Primary	Competitive Primary?
2010 (continued)					
3	B. Kerttula	D	96.5	100.0	No
4	C. Munoz	R	97.0	100.0	No
11	T. Wilson	R	76.9	100.0	No
13	C. Gatto	R	96.4	56.2	Yes
15	M. Neuman	R	95.8	65.3	No
16	B. Stoltze	R	78.0	100.0	No
17	A. Fairclough	R	96.9	100.0	No
18	D. Saddler	R	68.9	35.5	Yes (3-way race)
20	M. Gruenberg	D	68.6	87.6	No
22	S. Cissna	D	92.6	100.0	No
23	L. Gara	D	94.4	100.0	No
24	B. Gardner	D	92.5	100.0	No
25	M. Doogan	D	65.0	91.6	
26	L. Holmes	D	71.1	100.0	No
28	C. Johnson	R	65.0	100.0	No
31	B. Lynn	R	67.5	60.1	Yes
32	M. Hawker	R	70.4	100.0	No
33	K. Olson	R	76.3	100.0	No
34	C. Chenault	R	80.7	100.0	No
35	P. Seaton	R	97.4	100.0	No
36	A. Austerman	R	68.0	100.0	No
37	B. Edgmon	D	97.1	100.0	No
38	B. Herron	D	97.8	100.0	No
39	N. Foster	D	95.9	57.8	Yes
40	R. Joule	D	97.6	100.0	No

	Number	% of Total
Uncompetitive general elections (out of 500 total)	220	44.0%
Uncontested general elections (out of 500 total)	106	21.2%
Uncompetitive primaries preceding uncompetitive general (out of 220 total)	189	85.9%
Uncontested primaries preceding uncompetitive general (out of 220 total)	153	69.5%

Notes: We define a competitive election, for the purposes of this report, as one in which the winner receives less than 65 percent of the vote.
1) Senate District are in grey-scale.
2) Highlighted cells for general and primary election vote percentages indicate an uncontested race. Uncontested vote totals in general elections do not tally 100 percent due to the impact of write-in votes.
Source: Alaska Division of Elections, *http://www.elections.alaska.gov/ei_return.php.*