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LOBBYIST REPORT -- OCTOBER 8, 1998

POLITICAL UPDATE:

In a few days, November 3rd to be exact, Oregon voters will make its political will know. This will close one of the most uninteresting, uninspired campaign seasons in recent memory. When you take a look at the ballot, you can understand why most observers are now predicting a record low voter turnout.

At the top of the ballot, with one exception, there are no real contests. Ron Wyden will easily defeat John Lim for US Senate ... Greg Walden (2nd Cong. District), Earl Blumenauer (3rd Cong. District), Peter DeFazio (4th Cong. District) and Darlene Hooley (5th Cong. District) will all be easy US Representative winners. Thus the only contest is in the 1st Congressional District where Molly Bordonaro and David Wu are pitted in a close contest.

Oregon's statewide races are not very compelling either. John Kitzhaber should be easily returned as Governor, and Stan Bunn seems to have a clear edge over Margaret Carter.

As uninspiring as this electoral season may be, the results, particularly those for the state legislature, are very important. This fall one half of the State Senate (15 of 30) seats, and all 60 State House of Representatives seats will be filled. Which party wins the majority of these races will "be in control" of the Legislature. Because everyone gets tired of hearing "political junkies" constantly chatter on about who will control the legislature, most people tend to trivialize and discount what this really means. Because of a couple of unusual points in the State Constitution the Presiding Officers (President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House) have an incredible amount of power. Because the Presiding Officers are selected by majority vote of the members, the party that has the most members gets to select them, which in turn allows them to appoint the committee members and chairs and set the political agenda.

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The Republicans will again control the Senate. Barring an upset of a Democrat, the Republican margin will range from 16 to 21. 17 is a likely number, but the contest in Districts 3 and 14 will probably determine the margin. If the Democrats hold their favored seats, win in District 14 (possible) and upset Sen. Hartung, District 3 (difficult, but possible) the Democrats can cut the margin to 16. It appears that the Republican majority will be evenly split between the moderates and the conservatives. There is no apparent reason why Brady Adams shouldn't return as President of the Senate.

Barring upsets, the Republican should again control the House. They could have as many as 35 members, but no fewer than 31. Barring upsets the Democrats could have as many as 28 members, and as few as 24. It appears that the Republican majority will be split between the moderates and conservatives. Unlike the Senate, however, a tussle for leadership could occur in the House. Right now Lynn Lundquist is the Speaker and under normal circumstances would be expected to be the Speaker in 1999. However, a number of influential conservatives tried to defeat him in the May Primary and will try to deny him the Speakership. It is not clear if they have the muscle to accomplish their goal.

Usually, if nothing else will, in the past the various ballot measures excited the electorate and got them to the polls. This year no one seems to care very much about the various measures either, which will also contribute to a low turn out.

Next month, if the votes are counted fast enough, I will report on the results of the election.