



Capitol Network News

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STATE GOP GAIN BREAKS NATIONAL TREND

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) State Republicans didn't pull off the big upset for which they had hoped — control of the House and control of significantly more seats in the Senate — but the results of this month's general election bode better for Oklahoma's GOP than the party's affiliates in other parts of the country.

Republicans lost control of 100 of the 5,989 seats up for grabs in the Nov. 5 general election, and in doing so, transferred control of five legislative chambers to their Democratic opponents. Before the general election, Republicans completely controlled 18 state legislatures, while Democrats held 16 and 15 were split. After the election, Democrats had won control of the larger block — 20 — while Republican holdings

remained at 18. Ten remained split and one, Texas, will not be decided until early next month.

In terms of legislative chambers, Republicans had control of 50 of the 99, Democrats controlled 46, including Oklahoma's House and Senate, and two were tied going into the election. The Nov. 5 results, however, gave the Democrats control of 51 state chambers, while the Republicans held on to 45. Two chambers are tied and a December election will decide which party takes over a one-vote advantage in the Texas Senate.

Democrats outnumber Republicans 65 to 36 in the state House, although the parties exchanged two seats, and 33 to 15 in the Senate, where the state GOP wrested away two seats.

To gain their national advantage, Democrats reclaimed the Connecticut Senate, the Illinois House and the Michigan House, as well as the California Assembly, where Republicans had held a one-seat advantage. Democrats also won the Maine Senate, the Vermont Senate and the Nevada Assembly, which had been tied before the general elec-

tion. Additionally, they regained control of the Tennessee Senate, which the party had lost due to party switches after the 1994 elections.

Republicans, however, notched some important victories. The GOP won control of the Florida Senate in 1994 and took control of the state House with victories in the general election, giving the party control of that state's legislature for the first time since Reconstruction. Also changing to Republican hands were the Iowa and Washington senates.

In addition to the tie in the Texas Senate, two chambers are tied: The Indiana House, which the Republicans had previously controlled, and the Virginia Senate.

Recently-reelected minority floor leader Rep. Larry Ferguson, R-Cleveland, said last week that the Oklahoma results had left his delegation in a "surprisingly good mood," despite seeing their hopes of significant gains in legislative membership beaten back during the general election.

"When you look at what happened across the country," said Ferguson, "where there were so many states in which the Democrats

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PANEL TOLD STATE READY FOR ENERGY COMPETITION

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Oklahoma has the infrastructure and is ready for competition in the natural gas industry, members of the Commission on Natural Gas Policy were told Thursday.

Doug Burton made the comments during a discussion of SB959, the Natural Gas Competitiveness Act, which failed to win legislative approval last year. A similar proposal may be introduced during the 46th legislature.

Burton said, "There were a lot of Chicken Little stories" when the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) deregulated the natural gas market, "but the sky didn't fall." Burton said he expected similar results if the state moved to promote competition in the natural gas industry in Oklahoma.

Burton said his idea was supported by what he called "one of the state's best kept secrets — its pipeline infrastructure." Five pipelines, Burton said, reach into practically every corner of the state, and those pipelines, he added, make up only a small portion of the pipelines criss-crossing the state.

"This gives us the ability to deliver natural gas throughout Oklahoma," he said.

By allowing and promoting competition at the city gate, Burton said, "It will lead to innovation in service delivery and ultimately lower prices" for the consumer. Such a move would also benefit the economy, he added, by expanding natural gas markets and reducing the likelihood that large industries might have to shutdown during the peak gas usage times in the winter.

To help promote competition in the in-

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