

# Election FOCUS 2004

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## FAST FACTS:

✓ **The U.S.** has no less than 87,900 local governments including municipalities, counties, townships, school districts and special districts.

– U.S. Bureau of Census

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## Congressional, State Elections Heat Up

With so much media coverage focusing on the presidential election this year, it is easy to forget that in November 2004, there are elections for 34 U.S. Senate seats and all 435 seats of the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as hundreds of state and local leaders.

The Senate races — along with the presidential race — appear to be heating up throughout the country. The battleground states in the 2004 Senate race will most likely be in the South. “There are five Democratic seats that are up for grabs in southern states that prefer Republicans including North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Louisiana,” says Gary Nordlinger, a Washington D.C. political consultant. “The odds favor the Senate staying in Republican control.”

President George W. Bush won all of these southern states in the 2000 presidential election and in three of them – South Carolina, Georgia, and North

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Mayor David Miller, Elkhart, Indiana; Mayor Bill Baarsma, Tacoma, Washington Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, D.C. April 20, 2004

## Two Mayors' Perspectives on Local 2004 Election Issues

On April 20 the Republican mayor of Elkhart, Indiana, David Miller and the Democratic mayor of Tacoma, Washington, Bill Baarsma spoke at the Foreign Press Center in Washington, D.C., about their perspectives as local leaders and important issues in the 2004 election.

Although the mayors belong to different political parties and represent different geographical constituencies, they demonstrate that the old adage “all politics is local” still rings true. They each face daily a myriad of issues that directly affect their constituencies.

However, these local leaders are also facing international issues from trade to the war on terror, and funding needs after the September 11 terrorist attacks that have required local governments to produce creative plans to insure their governments run smoothly and effectively.

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Carolina – won by 10 percentage points or more. For this reason, many commentators argue that the Republican Party will maintain its majority in the Senate and may even gain seats. Republicans currently hold 51 seats against the Democrats' 48. One Senator is an Independent.

As for the Democrats, there are Republican seats in Illinois and Alaska where they believe they have a reasonable chance of picking up a Senate seat, Nordlinger said. "But what you will see coming out of these races is a closely divided Senate regardless of who's in control."

As in the presidential race, Senate contests often involve a primary process in which parties select their candidate from several contenders. In Pennsylvania, for example, there was an unusually strong primary challenge to Republican incumbent Arlen Specter by conservative Congressman Patrick Toomey who claimed that Specter's liberal stances on such issues as reproductive rights, affirmative action and labor, were not representative of the party's philosophy. Although they disagree on a number of issues, President Bush campaigned in support of Specter. It was generally believed that Specter was more likely to win against the Democratic challenger in November. On April 27 Specter won a narrow victory over

Toomey to become the Republican candidate.

Every two years, all 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives are up for re-election, unlike senators who serve six-year terms. The Republicans have had control of the House for the last 10 years and currently have 228 seats compared to the Democrats 205. Most analysts agree that the 2004 election will not result in a drastic change in the composition of the House.

"Barring a catastrophe, the House is certain to remain Republican," Nordlinger said. "They may even pick up seats."

According to Congressional Quarterly, the Democratic Party would need to maintain each of its vulnerable seats and win almost all of the competitive seats held by Republicans in order to gain a majority.

Having control of the Senate or the House brings significant political advantages. The majority party controls the legislative agenda in large measure through the power of its committee chairs. Winning the Senate or House is a major priority for both parties, second only in importance to winning the White House.

In addition to the national races in 2004, 11 states in total will hold races for Governor with 8 incumbents running for re-election and three states

holding open elections as a result of retirements. A number of state legislators are up for re-election as well. Finally, there are elections scheduled in most of the approximately 88,000 local government units across the United States comprised of cities, towns, municipalities, counties, townships, villages, school districts and special districts.

Local government is the smallest and most direct form of government in the United States and party affiliation at that level of government melt away in favor of a candidate's ability to perform the important and necessary practical duties that exist at the local level of government. From Mayors of cities to town and village councilmen and women, these local elected officials directly serve the needs of their constituencies by providing services such as police and fire protection, education, housing and public transportation.

In an election year voters in local elections can gauge the performance of these local officials. If local needs are not met — a voter can easily look at the conditions of the roads in their towns or the quality of the schools and decide — the official may not be re-elected. ■



THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The U.S. Department of State is pleased to present its election coverage newsletter, **Election Focus 2004**. The newsletter will provide non-partisan coverage of the U.S. election process, featuring articles, interviews, public opinion polls, and other information on the presidential primaries, debates, conventions and campaign activities of the major presidential candidates.

**Election Focus 2004** is produced by the Democracy and Human Rights team in the Bureau of International Information Programs.

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## Two Mayor's Perspectives on Local 2004 Election Issues

Following are excerpts from the Foreign Press Center briefing on select topics of importance to mayors and other local government leaders.

### What is the role of a mayor in politics today?

**MAYOR MILLER:** At the local level, there is no elected officer that affects people's day-to-day lives more than the mayor. The things I address on a day-to-day basis include trash pickup, the condition of streets, police, fire and 911 dispatch services, airports and parks and everything in between, including water and sewer issues.

[Mayors] touch the lives of their constituencies and are responsible for the things that touch their lives probably more than the President, more than senators, more than governors, more than any other elected officer.

So it brings our responsibility right to their front door. And because we live in those folks' neighborhoods, we see them all the time.

There isn't a Republican or a Democratic way to plow a street or to pick up trash or to respond to a police call or put out a fire. The partisan politics that people may see on the national level generally don't exist much, or at least not with the same steam, at the local levels.

So we have to find ways to work with people to take care of their problems without respect to their party politics.

**MAYOR BAARSMA:** I would share

the sentiments of the Mayor in that all politics, indeed, is local when it comes to city politics and things that are of immediate concern to citizens.

Picking up the refuse and making sure that the street lights stay on, and repairing sidewalks and making sure that police and the fire service respond appropriately, and struggling with the budget to provide those basic services are a part of our charge.

Part of my responsibility, too, as the mayor of the second largest city in the State of Washington and the city with the largest container port, is to maintain a good working relationship with our congressional delegation. Now, it turns out they all happen to be Democrats, which is of the other party, but, they are all very talented.

It's interesting that one member of Congress happens to be a constituent of mine, but I'm not a constituent of his because I live in a different congressional district. But I have a good working relationship with our two members of Congress as well as our two U.S. senators.

So we have to maintain the relationships at the national level and the state level. Mayors are also advocates of city interests at the state capital, and local government is dependent, to a large degree, on decisions that are made in [Washington, D.C.] as well.

### What are the important issues for the local constituencies that you serve?

**MAYOR BAARSMA:** We are strongly working toward a balanced and vibrant economy in the city of Tacoma with job creation and working closely with the port. So economic development is important.

Now, given that we're a port city,

"We're about doing our business which takes care of our various communities, and we work with the federal government where we need to in the overlapping partnerships. But they pretty much let us run the cities, and we let the president run the country."

-- Mayor David Miller

obviously security is of paramount concern, so there is that relationship between economic development and the growth of the port and the terrorist threat.

The second issue in our strategic plan is to provide a safe, secure and livable environment within our neighborhoods and to make sure that the infrastructure of our city is provided for.

And our third goal is the goal of government by results. We're going to have to begin to do things smarter and be more effective and more efficient in terms of service delivery.

**MAYOR MILLER:** Terrorism and the strikes against the United States showed us that it can happen here and that they could bring their atrocities to our nation, and therefore it made Tacoma and Elkhart and other communities potential targets.

So we've had to kind of assess the risk and take additional measures just to try to take us off the terrorists' radar screen, or at least make sure that if they attempt to do something they can't succeed. And we're a major thoroughfare through rail and truck traffic and a distribution point, so we have to watch those things, too.

But the best benefit that Washington can give to communities like ours is to be sure that the national security is intact and that their economic conditions are as strong as possible so that our businesses can survive and thrive in our communities.

### Has the relationship between the federal government and local government changed after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks?

**MAYOR MILLER:** Our relationship and the city's relationship with Washington have not changed as a result of the terrorists. It is harder to travel now, but that's nationwide, global even. But [Washington D.C.] is not neglecting us or ignoring us. They're focusing their attention where it rightly needs to be focused, on ensuring the safety and tranquility of the United States in general.

We're about doing our business which takes care of our various communities, and we work with the federal government where we need to in the overlapping partnerships. But they pretty much let us run the cities, and we let the president run the country.

**MAYOR BAARSMA:** I am concerned about this particular issue. We've recently done an inventory in the city of Tacoma, as to the basic needs, in terms of our infrastructure. We have about \$800 million in needs. Now this includes bridges, roads, sidewalks, lights, and so on. And a portion of what we have been able to accomplish in the past has been through federal assistance in the infrastructure, building a stronger country.

We're also concerned about other funding sources that are important in terms of social and human services. We have gone through a period of

what's called evolution, in which the responsibilities of helping those families that have economic hardship have fallen to state and local governments.

So we do have a concern. My feeling is that if our infrastructure crumbles and we can't rebuild our bridges and maintain our roads, and so on, that it's going to have a long-term economic effect. I share the concerns of Mayor Miller about terrorism and addressing the issues. Since 9/11, everything has changed, but at the same time, we can't neglect or forget the basic infrastructure of our own country.

The challenge comes from the fact that there are declining resources. Our ability to receive certain federal appropriations has decreased. I come to Washington asking for assistance, like probably most other mayors and community leaders do. We've been fortunate to receive some, but it's a matter of making due with what we have and still moving our cities forward.

So it just makes more challenges for us in local leadership, to figure out how to replace our streets when there is less federal money, and replace our sewers when there is less assistance to do those things. I'm confident, though, in the spirit of America that we'll be able to find a way to do that and still continue to make Tacoma and Elkhart, and all of the other cities livable for the future. ■



**DEMOCRATIC-HELD SENATE SEATS**

**Republican Favored (1)**

**GEORGIA — Open/Zell Miller (D)**  
2000 vote: 58 percent  
The story here is the Democrats' failure so far to find a top-tier candidate to succeed Miller, a conservative who is retiring after being appointed and winning a special election in 2000. Georgia's rightward lean benefits Republicans, and the GOP field includes candidates such as Reps. Johnny Isakson and Mac Collins.

**Leans Republican (1)**

**SOUTH CAROLINA — Open/Ernest F. Hollings (D)**  
1998 vote: 53 percent  
Hollings would have been challenged had he run in increasingly Republican South Carolina. Democrats now must fight to hold the seat without the incumbent. But they settled early on a candidate — state Education Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum — while the GOP has a multi-candidate primary featuring former Gov. David Beasley, Rep. Jim DeMint, former state Attorney General Charlie Condon and businessman Thomas Ravenel.

**No Clear Favorite (3)**

**FLORIDA — Open/Bob Graham (D)**  
1998 vote: 62 percent  
The popular Graham likely would have won easily had he run, but his decision not to seek a fourth term set up a free-for-all in politically competitive Florida. Several candidates in each party already are running.

**LOUISIANA — John B. Breaux (D)**  
1998 vote: 64 percent  
Breaux would have been a shoo-in but his retirement has set off an expected tossup race in politically competitive and

conservative-leaning Louisiana. Two House members — Democrat Chris John and Republican David Vitter — are in the race.

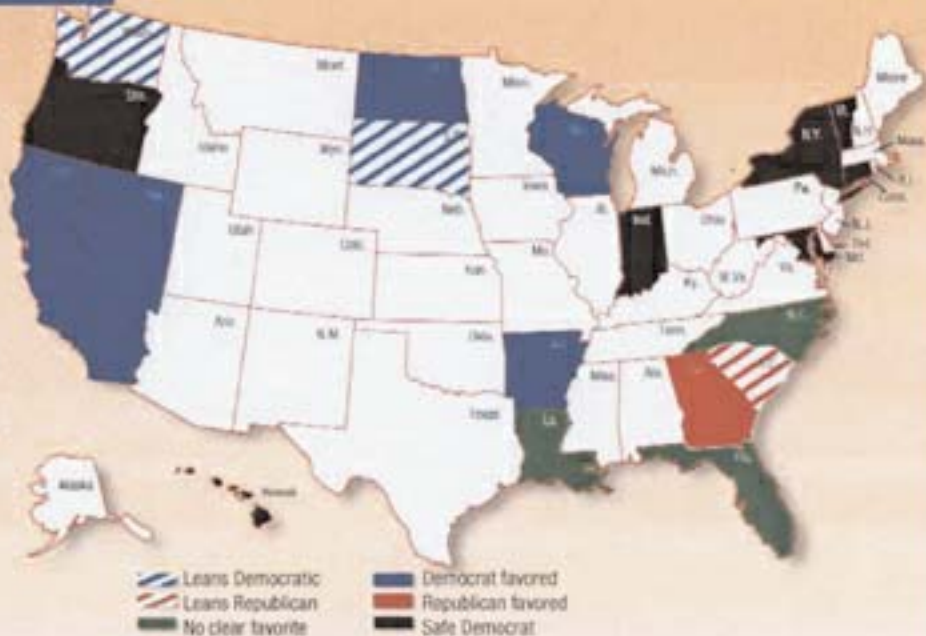
**NORTH CAROLINA — Open/John Edwards (D)**  
1998 vote: 51 percent  
Edwards might have faced a tough fight in conservative-leaning North Carolina, so Democrats are at risk in an open-seat race. Their likely candidate, businessman and ex-Clinton chief of staff Erskine Bowles, lost the 2002 Senate race to Republican Elizabeth Dole but built name identification and has proven fundraising skills. Republicans are high on their candidate, Rep. Richard M. Burr, but he enters without a statewide base.

**Leans Democratic (2)**

**SOUTH DAKOTA — Tom Daschle (D)**  
1998 vote: 62 percent

Though Daschle's position as the top Senate Democrat helps him deliver for Republican-leaning South Dakota, Republican strategists contend they can make him a symbol of Democratic liberalism. The GOP scored a big recruiting success by coaxing a bid by former Rep. John Thune, who narrowly lost the 2002 Senate race to Democrat Tim Johnson.

**WASHINGTON — Patty Murray (D)**  
1998 vote: 58 percent  
Last time, Murray easily fended off GOP charges that she is too liberal, and she is bolstered by strong fundraising skills. GOP Rep. George Nethercutt gives her a serious opponent, but Dems say he is too conservative for a Democratic-leaning state. The GOP first tried to recruit Rep. Jennifer Dunn, who is more moderate, but she said no and instead is retiring from politics.



**States Where Democrats Have the Advantage**

**Democrat Favored (5)**

**ARKANSAS — Blanche Lincoln (D)**  
1998 vote: 55 percent

**CALIFORNIA — Barbara Boxer (D)**  
1998 vote: 53 percent

**NEVADA — Harry Reid (D)**  
1998 vote: 48 percent

**NORTH DAKOTA — Byron L. Dorgan (D)**  
1998 vote: 63 percent

**WISCONSIN — Russell D. Feingold (D)**  
1998 vote: 51 percent

**Safe Democratic (7)**

**CONNECTICUT — Christopher J. Dodd (D)**  
1998 vote: 65 percent

**HAWAII — Daniel K. Inouye (D)**  
1998 vote: 79 percent

**INDIANA — Evan Bayh (D)**  
1998 vote: 64 percent

**MARYLAND — Barbara A. Mikulski (D)**  
1998 vote: 71 percent

**NEW YORK — Charles E. Schumer (D)**  
1998 vote: 55 percent

**OREGON — Ron Wyden (D)**  
1998 vote: 61 percent

**VERMONT — Patrick J. Leahy (D)**  
1998 vote: 72 percent

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Government.