

Candidates run lavish race in District 22

■ Sekula Gibbs outspends Olson; both candidates lend money to their campaigns

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Republican Shelley Sekula Gibbs' campaign has spent more than \$1.2 million in the race for Democratic U.S. Rep. Nick Lampson's seat, apparently the most lavish effort in Texas this year.

A newly filed Federal Election Commission document details Sekula Gibbs' expenses, as well as a \$250 donation by her former deputy campaign manager to her April 8 primary runoff opponent, Pete Olson.

District has big spenders

Olson, a former Senate staffer, has spent at least \$687,000 in campaign money.

Sekula Gibbs, a dermatologist, got 30 percent of the vote in the March primary to Olson's 21 percent. Eight other GOP candidates trailed.

The 22nd Congressional District campaign attracted high spending and the state's largest number of Republican candidates because its former representative, Tom DeLay, designed it to favor Republican candidates. Sekula Gibbs served the last seven weeks of his 2006

term after he resigned, and she failed in a write-in campaign to block Lampson from winning the next two-year term.

Olson and Sekula Gibbs have loaned significant amounts of personal money to their campaign treasuries, according to FEC records, which cover a period ending March 19. Olson has now put in a total of \$170,000; Sekula Gibbs, \$240,000.

From Feb. 14 through last week, Olson raised more money than Sekula Gibbs from individual donors, \$204,634 to \$157,141. Both pulled in contributions from supporters around the nation and local businessmen. The bulk of their campaign money has been used for broadcast and mail advertising.

Olson also gained a rush of campaign dollars from current and former Republican members of Congress. House Minority Leader John Boehner's political fund pumped \$10,000 to Olson, and some of the 12 Texas GOP congressmen who have endorsed him backed up their support with contributions up to the \$2,300 limit. Olson's former boss, former Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, contributed money as did his wife, Wendy Gramm.

Some changing sides

Some Sekula Gibbs supporters say the contributions show that Olson is a Washington insider rather than a candidate with grass-roots support.

Some Olson supporters say Sekula Gibbs lost the confidence of her former Capitol Hill colleagues because of her performance during those seven weeks, when her staffers, who had worked for DeLay, quit as a group in protest of what they called mistreatment by their new boss.

Houston homebuilder Bob Perry, who contributed last year to Sekula Gibbs' campaign, gave money to Olson this time. Connecticut-based pollster Matt Dabrowski, Sekula Gibbs' deputy campaign manager until three weeks ago, made the \$250 contribution to Olson on March 10, according to campaign finance records. Around the same time, he got \$3,646 in "separation pay" from the Sekula Gibbs' campaign.

Dabrowski had no comment when reached by phone. C.B. Currier, Sekula Gibbs' campaign manager, said he and Dabrowski agreed Dabrowski needed to leave the campaign to seek medical care from his family doctor. Currier said he had no idea why Dabrowski ended up being an Olson supporter.