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Congressmen endorse Olson in GOP's District 22 runoff

■ They pass over Sekula Gibbs, who held the job after DeLay resigned

By **ALAN BERNSTEIN**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Twelve Republican congressmen from Texas have endorsed former Senate staffer Pete Olson in the primary runoff for Democratic U.S. Rep. Nick Lampson's district, shunning a former colleague in the process.

Olson's opponent in the 22nd Congressional District's April 8 runoff is dermatologist Shelley Sekula Gibbs, who served in the job for seven weeks in 2006 after Tom DeLay's resignation.

The dozen lawmakers have e-mailed a letter to supporters and contributors in and out of Texas, calling Olson "the candidate best equipped to face Congressman Nick Lampson" in the Houston-area race.

D.C. connections

The appeal for Olson highlights his connections in Washington — an element of his campaign that has cut both ways in the congressional district.

Olson's former bosses, U.S. Sens. Phil Gramm and John Cornyn, both of Texas, have helped with Olson's campaign;

his campaign manager is Luke Marchant, son of Rep. Kenny Marchant, who is on the endorsement list. Opponents have criticized Olson as a carpetbagger from Capitol Hill whose seed money came from lobbyists.

A version of the letter for Olson refers questions to Tandy Harrison, a Washington-based employee of a consulting firm that works on fundraising, public affairs and government relations. Harrison is former director of political affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Another version refers questions to Houston fundraiser Sue Walden, whose clients have included John McCain and DeLay.

In a written statement Friday, Sekula Gibbs said Olson's "Washington, D.C., support" is no surprise because he worked there. Olson grew up in the Houston area, attended college and law school in Texas and then joined the Navy.

"The main difference between Pete Olson and me is that I've lived, worked and raised a family here for over 20 years," she added. "I'm grateful for the support of dozens of Republican leaders, local community officials, and hundreds of Republican volunteers. . . . Pete Olson is not a bad person, it's just that he should be running for Congress in the D.C. suburbs where

he lives, not here in Texas where it seems he's just passing through."

12 congressmen

Other congressmen backing Olson are John Culberson and Michael McCaul, whose districts cover west Harris County; Pete Sessions, Jeb Hensarling, Sam Johnson, Mike Conaway, Randy Neugebauer, Mac Thornberry, Louie Gohmert, Kay Granger and Lamar Smith.

Missing in action: Houston area GOP lawmakers Ted Poe, Kevin Brady and Ron Paul.

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