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■ Joshua Mauldin was sentenced to 25 years in prison for burning his infant daughter in a microwave oven.
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District 22 candidates spar over spending

By ALAN BERNSTEIN
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The Republican candidates seeking to run against Democratic U.S. Rep. Nick Lampson criticized each other Wednesday about their approaches to spending government money.

Dermatologist Shelley Sekula Gibbs pointed out that many Texas residents oppose development of the Trans-Texas Corridor, otherwise known as Interstate 69, which former Senate staffer Pete Olson lists on his campaign Web site as a funding project he worked on.

"I-69 is also known as the NAFTA super highway and the Trans-Texas Corridor
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DISTRICT: Finalists battle over corridor

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and is something that the people of Texas are almost universally opposed to," Sekula Gibbs said. "That is a boondoggle and a huge government land grab."

Olson, whose site states that he helped Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, get funding for the project, did not respond during a debate videotaped to be broadcast at 8:30 p.m. April 4 and 5:30 p.m. April 6 on the KUHT (Channel 8) program *The Connection: Red, White and Blue*.

The corridor is slated to run from the Texas-Mexico border to Northeast Texas. Opponents object to plans to lease part of the highway to foreign companies and obtain some of the land from ranching and agricultural swaths of the state; supporters say it would boost international trade and provide a pathway for mass transit, fuel pipelines, power lines and toll roads.

Before the debate, Olson criticized Sekula Gibbs in writing for her spending on congressional funds during the seven weeks in 2006 she spent in the 22nd Congressional District seat that Lampson took over.

Citing congressional records, Olson highlighted Sekula Gibbs' use of about \$76,000 for printing and postage for an official newsletter to constituents. The amount exceeds such spending by other Texas congressmen for an entire year.

Olson called the newsletter a propaganda piece that Sekula Gibbs used to burnish her image at taxpayer expense.

"The voters of this district deserve and expect much better," Olson said. "I look forward to joining with other budget hawks in Congress to cut excessive spending, excessive earmarking, and excessive taxation."

Sekula Gibbs said the spending was "within the range of what a congressman would be expected to do." She also called Olson a hypocrite for criticizing her use of government funds after years of authorizing congressional office expenditures as chief of staff for Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

The GOP runoff is April 8.