
THURSDAY
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INSIDE

■ The average Houston homeowner will pay \$88 a year more in combined city and county property taxes. **STORY ON PAGE B2**

22ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Lampson, Olson stake claims on political spectrum

By **ALAN BERNSTEIN**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Rascally liberal Jim Hightower, the former Texas agriculture commissioner, gets credit for the phrase, "There's nothing in the middle of the road but yellow stripes and dead armadillos."

Key questions in the Houston-area race between Democratic U.S. Rep. Nick Lampson and Republican former Senate aide Pete Olson are whether Lampson has earned his middle-of-the-road stripes — and whether his political career will die there Nov. 4.

After all, master map-maker Tom DeLay helped design the mostly suburban 22nd Congressional District to re-elect him and any Republicans who followed. But after the politically besieged DeLay resigned in mid-2006, leaving no chance for the GOP to replace him on the ballot, Lampson cruised to victory.

Lampson has tried to relieve the odd fit ever since, saying that he votes in Congress according to what he considers the wishes of his constituents, rather than any partisan agenda he may have followed as a

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CANDIDATES: U.S. Rep. Nick Lampson, left, says he votes the wishes of his constituents. Pete Olson, right, says he is a conservative and plans to vote that way if elected to the 22nd Congressional District.

CONGRESS: National GOP badly wants to win back district

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Beaumont-based congressman from 1997 to 2005. For example, Lampson was against drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge before he was for it.

Now that Lampson has on-the-ballot Republican opposition for the first time here, along with a challenge from Libertarian John Wieder, the national Republican Party badly wants the seat back, seeing few other chances around the country to expand its ranks in the House this year.

Olson, who worked on Capitol Hill for U.S. Sens. Phil Gramm and John Cornyn of Texas after serving as a Navy pilot and Pentagon liaison to Congress, does not try to muscle Lampson out of the centrist position. Nor does he always acknowledge that Lampson is there.

On some occasions Olson has tried to portray Lampson and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California as conjoined left-wing twins. Other times the challenger has said Lampson has become a moderate, but only in betrayal of his true self and his former voting record.

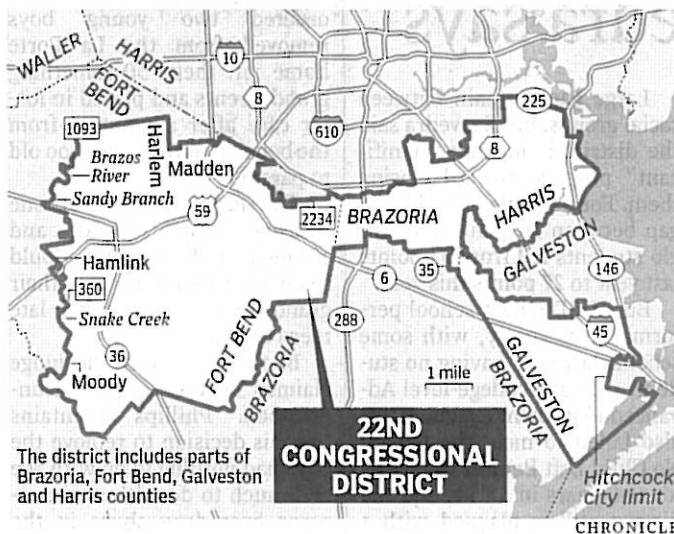
Either way, Olson has said, the district is conservative, its congressman is not, and that needs to change.

"I don't think people necessarily want someone in the middle," Olson said.

"I have a fundamental set of values that people aren't going to question," he added. "Nick's values, you don't know which side of the issue he is on right now."

Olson models himself after Gramm, saying the former senator forged compromises on landmark legislation by presenting a consistent, committed front for conservatism.

Lampson said Pelosi and other Democratic legislative leaders have created an atmosphere that, unlike the House under GOP control, allows moderates of both parties to make progress on energy, NASA funding and other issues. He often mentions his membership in the Blue Dog Democrats, who



The district includes parts of Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston and Harris counties

22ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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NICK LAMPSON

Democrat, Stafford

■ Age: 63

■ **Career highlights:** Teacher, Jefferson County tax assessor-collector, congressman

■ **Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees from Lamar University.

are fiscally conservative, and the Center Aisle Caucus.

"I have always supported measures to reduce our budget deficit, put a stop to wasteful spending and keep taxes low for the middle class," Lampson said.

Olson said such statements are outrageously untrue. He cites a series of bills that Lampson voted against.

Lampson said Olson is distorting his record by singling out Republican legislation that never had a chance to gain bipartisan support, and that other versions of the same bills succeeded.

Based on last year's House votes, the nonpartisan National Journal rated Lampson a centrist, placing only seven other Democrats closer to the statistical mid-point for all 435 members.

Lampson voted with Democrats to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program and set deadlines for troop with-

PETE OLSON

Republican, Sugar Land

■ Age: 45

■ **Career highlights:** U.S. Navy, Pentagon staffer, U.S. Senate aide

■ **Education:** Bachelor's degree from Rice University, law degree from University of Texas.

drawals from Iraq; he voted with Republicans to preserve tax cuts for oil companies and give spy agencies expanded authority to conduct wiretaps without court orders.

Lampson said his endorsements from the National Rifle Association, Texas Farm Bureau and Veterans of Foreign Wars show his ties to conservative causes. However the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, after giving Lampson an award for voting at least 70 percent its way, endorsed Olson on the notion that he would side with the organization more often.

In addition to opposing expansion of the children's health insurance program, Olson is against government requirements on the fuel efficiency of vehicles, saying that consumer demand alone should determine how auto manufacturers design their products. Olson also wants to replace the federal income tax with a consumption tax that levies the same rate on all

spenders.

Lampson, who chairs a House subcommittee that oversees the National Weather Service, wants to add three staffers in each of the 122 forecasting bureaus around the country to work with emergency response officials during severe weather, chemical spills and other hazards. Olson said the plan amounts to throwing government money at a problem that does not exist because, he said, weather forecasting was not a problem in the response to Hurricane Ike.

The hurricane aftermath provided Lampson an unusually high profile as he helped coordinate government relief programs across the district, which includes most of Fort Bend

County, southeast Harris County and parts of Galveston and Brazoria counties.

Olson's campaign fundraising efforts got off the ground with help from Gramm, Cornyn and lobbyists. With a campaign staff that includes some former DeLay campaign aides, he won the Republican nomination against nine other candidates. In an April GOP runoff, he defeated Shelley Sekula Gibbs, who had carried the Republican banner against Lampson in 2006 as a write-in candidate.

Coming into October, Lampson had \$1.2 million in campaign funds on hand, Olson \$469,000, according to Federal Election Commission records.

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