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## U.S. chamber decides to endorse Olson

■ Earlier this year, the group's leader praised Lampson

By ALAN BERNSTEIN  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce agrees with Rep. Nick Lampson on energy policy and gave the Democratic congressman an award in April for being "an effective ally to the business community."

Republican challenger Pete Olson is diametrically opposed to the business federation on what to do about the 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

But today the Washington-based coalition of millions of businesses will endorse Olson for election on Nov. 4 to the 22nd District U.S. House seat.

The chamber, which lobbies for trade agreements and against many labor union initiatives and proposed business regulations, said the endorsement makes sense despite the candidates' stances on some of the biggest issues of the year.

Chamber regional director Peter Havel said the political

group has to consider Lampson's entire career in Congress, starting in 1997 when he represented a different, heavily unionized district that ran from east Harris County to Beaumont.

### 'Best supporting actor'

Last year, Lampson took the chamber's side on 84 percent of his legislative votes, qualifying for the chamber's annual Spirit of Enterprise award. But his cumulative score is 51 percent, according to the chamber.

"Winning it once does not erase the abysmal record he has had," said Havel, due at a press conference with Olson in Sugar Land today.

Lampson said he has tried to represent the consensus of his current district, which connects most of Fort Bend County with parts of Harris, Brazoria and Galveston counties and was designed to elect Republicans.

"We want someone who is a strong advocate for our positions and not a candidate for the best supporting actor award (who is) being what somebody wants him to be," Havel said.

He added that Olson's stances on issues — he has called for smaller government

and taxes — show he will be in tune with the organization's nationwide membership.

Four months ago, however, chamber president Tom Donohue said Lampson was "supporting legislation that helps grow the economy and creates new jobs for hardworking Americans" and that "the Chamber is grateful for Nick's commitment to these important issues," according to a press release at the time from Lampson's congressional office.

But after the chamber Wednesday downplayed the importance of the praise based on one year of votes by the congressman, the congressman's campaign downplayed the importance of the chamber.

Lampson campaign consultant Mike Malaise said the chamber is an "inside the Beltway" organization that does not represent the consensus of local business organizations, which have seen Lampson advocate for funding that could save jobs at the Johnson Space Center.

The endorsement shows merely that Olson, a former Senate staffer with no legislative voting record, had a good relationship with lobbyists such as those who work for the cham-

ber, he said.

The chamber is endorsing at least two Democratic congressmen from Texas, Chet Edwards of Waco and Henry Cuellar of Laredo.

### Conflict on immigration

Olson said he was proud to have the endorsement "because they recognize I am focused on making sure American families can be successful through lower taxes, expanded energy production, and new health care options to cover millions of uninsured small business employees."

The chamber has endorsed a bipartisan bill on enhancing proven energy sources and developing new ones. Lampson is one of the original 47 congressional sponsors.

Olson is against offering a path for illegal immigrants to earn citizenship while staying in this country. The chamber favors the idea.

Havel, the chamber official, said the group will work with Olson on that issue and several others and spend more than \$25 million on its endorsed national candidates.

alan.bernstein@chron.com