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US House Updates

Texas: Olson Wins Runoff

Former Senate staffer and Navy veteran **Pete Olson** won the April 8 runoff to choose the Republican nominee to oppose freshman **Nick Lampson** (D) in Texas' 22nd District, the bailiwick once represented by former House Majority Leader **Tom DeLay** (R). With 100% of precincts reporting, Olson had a more than two-to-one lead -- 15,492 (69%) to 7,118 (31%) -- over **Shelley Sekula Gibbs**, a dermatologist and former Houston council-woman who held the seat for seven weeks filling out the balance of DeLay's 2006 term.

The results were a stunning reversal of the returns in the first primary on March 4 when Sekula Gibbs came in first in a field of ten candidates with 30% to Olson's 21%. Olson combined vigorous campaigning with strong support from the state's GOP establishment. Once an aide to US Sen. **John Cornyn** (R-TX) and former US Sen. **Phil Graham** (R-TX), Olson had the support of Cornyn and a majority of the Texas US House delegation. In addition, three of the losing candidates in the first primary, **Brian Klock**, **Kevyn Bazzy** and **Ryan Rowley**, whose combined totals came to 5% of the vote, endorsed Olson.

Sekula Gibbs attempted to blunt Olson's drive by calling him an outsider; he had moved from Northern Virginia, where he lived as a Senate staffer, to the district to run for congress. But Olson, a native of Texas, argued that he lived in Virginia simply because he worked in the Senate -- which gave him valuable experience -- not because he preferred Virginia to Texas.

Sekula Gibbs was endorsed by former Sugar Land Mayor **Dean Hrbacek**, who came in third with 10% in the first primary, and by State Board of Education member **Cynthia Dunbar**, who came in sixth with 4%, as well as by a number of local officeholders and GOP officials. However, she was burdened by well-publicized references to her allegedly authoritarian style during her brief tenure in congress, when most of DeLay's staff walked out rather than work for her.

On the money front, both candidates were well-funded, albeit much of it from their own pockets. Olson lent his campaign \$170,000; Gibbs lent hers \$540,000. In addition, in the last reporting period, from February 14 to March 19, Olson raised \$204,000 to Sekula Gibbs' \$157,000.



The district has a heavy Republican tilt (Bush 67% in 2004), but Olson will face a strong incumbent in Democrat Lampson. Although a freshman, he previously represented a neighboring and overlapping district for several terms. Once a national Democrat in outlook, he has developed a more moderate stance and voting record in the past two years. Moreover, at the end of last year, Lampson had \$716,000 on hand, and will probably report more at the end of the 1st Quarter of 2008.

Nevertheless, the national GOP ranks this seat near the absolute top in potential pickups. In 2006, Lampson won by only 52%, even though his GOP foe's somewhat cumbersome name -- Shelley Sekula Gibbs -- was not even on the ballot and had to be written in.

Louisiana: Favorites Win Runoffs

In Louisiana, the candidates who led in the first round of congressional primaries on March 8 won relatively easy victories in the April 5 runoffs to choose standard bearers for the May 3 General Election. The elections are to fill two vacancies in the Pelican State's US House delegation.

Louisiana 1 (Metairie, etc.) State Sen. **Steve Scalise** (R) won the Republican nomination in the runoff to replace former US Rep. **Bobby Jindal** (R), who resigned to become governor. With 100% of the precincts counted, Scalise had 19,334 (58%) to 13,956 (42%) for state Rep. **Tim Burns**. In this district, the Republican primary is tantamount to election.

In the first primary on March 8, Scalise led with 48% to 28% for Burns. Slidell Mayor **Ben Morris**, who finished third in the first primary with 21%, endorsed Burns in the runoff, but that was not enough to stop Scalise's momentum after his near-majority in the first vote. Scalise, 43, is a computer

systems engineer. He served three terms in the state House of Representatives prior to his election to the state Senate.

Scalise faces Democratic nominee **Gilda Reed**, a University of New Orleans psychology professor with labor union backing, in the May 3 General Election. Reed won the Democratic Primary on March 8 with 71%. Scalise is heavily favored to defeat Reed in this very Republican district, which **President Bush** carried with 71% in 2004. **Safe Republican.**

Louisiana 6 (Baton Rouge, etc.) In the 6th District, both Democrats and Republicans had runoffs to choose a nominee for the congressional seat vacated by US Rep. **Richard Baker** (R), who resigned to enter private business. **Louis "Woody" Jenkins**, a longtime state legislator and a major force among the state's conservative GOPers, easily won the Republican runoff. Jenkins received 15,177 votes (62%) to 9,327 (38%) for business-woman **Laurinda Calongne**.

In the first primary, Jenkins came in first with 49.86%, narrowly missing a victory without a runoff. Calongne was in second place with 25%, followed by Baker aide **Paul Sawyer**, who came in third with 23%. In the runoff campaign, Sawyer, who had attacked Jenkins in the first primary campaign, endorsed Calongne. Jenkins, however, received the backing of Livingston Parish President **Mike Grimmer** (D), the top ranking official in the second largest parish in the district.

Jenkins, 61, is a community newspaper publisher and former television broadcaster. While he had the strong conservative backing that he has enjoyed in his previous races, in this campaign, he made an appeal to more moderate voters, featuring a photograph of himself with **John McCain** on his website.



On the Democratic side, trial lawyer and state Rep. **Dan Cazayoux** defeated African-American state Rep. **Michael Jackson** with 19,803 (57%) to 15,063 (43%). In the first primary, Cazayoux led with 35%, to Jackson's 27%. Initially, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) recruited Cazayoux, who is white, to run against Baker. However, after Baker resigned and a number of candidates, black and white, entered the race, the DCCC remained neutral. Black attorney **Jason DeCuir**, who finished third with 19% in the first primary, endorsed Jackson, but that was not enough to help Jackson overtake Cazayoux.

In the May 3 General Election, **Ashley Casey**, a former aide to last year's millionaire gubernatorial candidate **John Georges**, is one of three independents on the ballot and could be a factor in the race. Casey, who has the support of Georges, has said if elected she would caucus with the Republicans.

A poll taken for Cazayoux by Anzalone Liszt (D) on March 17 and 18, before the two party's April 5 runoffs, showed Cazayoux would defeat Jenkins by 49% to 44%.

Meanwhile, the Democrats are filing a lawsuit alleging that an independent committee's TV ad for Jenkins illegally used a transcript that originated with the National Republican Congressional Committee.

The 6th District votes Republican, but not strongly as the 1st District. **President Bush** carried the 6th with 59% in 2004 and Jindal carried it with 56% in the 2007 governor's race. But, though the closed primaries make a direct comparison difficult, Democrats can be encouraged by the greater Democratic turnout in the first primary, as well as in the runoff. The district is 63% white, 33% black. If the district's African-American voters unite

behind Cazayoux, the race is likely to be competitive. For now, **Leans Republican**.

Mississippi: Democrats Hopeful

In Mississippi's 1st District (Tupelo, etc.), the Democratic nominee, Prentiss County Chancery Clerk **Travis Childers**, has released a survey, taken by Anzalone Liszt (D), showing Childers with 41% to 40% for Southaven Mayor **Greg Davis** (R) in the April 22 special election. However, because the names of candidates eliminated in the party primaries remain on the ballot, a poll containing six names was taken, and showed Childers behind, 27% to 29% for Davis. One or more of the losing contenders may sue to remove their names from the ballot.

Virginia 11: Connolly Ahead

A poll taken for **Gerry Connolly**, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, shows him with a major lead among registered voters likely to vote in the June 10 Democratic Primary to fill the open seat being vacated by US Rep. **Tom Davis** (R). Connolly had 45%, former US Rep. **Leslie Byrne** had 25% and two others, Iraq Navy veteran **Doug Denny** and **Lori Alexander**, had 1% each. The poll, published in *The Hill* newspaper, was taken in late March by Lake Research Partners. Meanwhile, Denny, once a Military Fellow on Capitol Hill, has received the endorsements of four congressmen (D), US Reps. **Phil Hare** (IL), **Patrick Murphy** (PA), **Joe Sestak** (D) and **Gene Taylor** (MS).

Texas: Craddick Gets Runoff Boost

Controversial, conservative **Tom Craddick** (R), speaker of the Texas state House of Representatives, started off the year 2008 looking like a goner to hold on to his powerful post in Lone Star government and politics. But



in the April 8 runoffs, probable Craddick supporters won the Republican nomination in all five contests for state representative. Gauging whether a lawmaker is going to vote for or against Craddick for speaker is not as easy as counting pledged delegates. Nevertheless, Craddick clearly gained.

“He’s in much better shape now than he was in February,” says **Will Lutz**, managing editor of the *Lone Star Report*. “It’s a lot easier for the math to work for him now, with the victories he won in the primaries -- Democratic and Republican -- and in the runoffs.” Says an Austin insider, “From the end of the session to the primary, I saw no path for Tom Craddick to retain the speaker’s office. Today, I see a path. It’s not going to be easy, but it is possible.”

Four of the five runoff victories represent gains for Craddick. Anti-Craddick incumbents lost, and so did anti-Craddick candidates for open seats in districts in which the retiring incumbent had been against him.

In District 81, for example, where state Rep. **“Buddy” West** (R) had at one point run against Craddick, former Judge **Tryon Lewis**, a Craddick supporter, won the runoff by 76% to 24%. The margin was due in large part to the Odessa business community going against West. Says a close observer of Texas politics, “The Odessa business community said, ‘We’re not going to risk losing a speaker from our region.’” Craddick is from nearby Midland. Other issues, such as West’s health, played a part. He receives regular dialysis treatments. Indeed, several days after the runoff, he was hospitalized for congestive heart failure.

For another example, in District 112, in a much closer race for an open seat that had been held by a Craddick foe, **Angie Button** defeated a “hard-core Craddick backer” by

53% to 47%; however, Button has indicated that she will support the speaker’s re-election.

But victories in the primaries don’t guarantee re-election to the speakership for Craddick. If Democrats make gains in November in the closely divided House -- currently 79R to 71D -- then Craddick is almost sure to lose. If, however, the GOP makes gains, then Craddick’s leadership will be reinforced.

The political climate in Texas is problematic for the Republicans. Says the Austin insider, “Control of the House depends on what happens nationally. It’s beginning to look like a perfect storm, with prevailing winds against the GOP.” However, he can also picture a scenario in which Republicans make gains. “If the Democrats stay split, if the economy rebounds, if McCain gets hard-core conservatives behind him, if Obama runs poorly, the Republicans could gain seats, but that’s probably difficult.” Indeed, he adds, “There are parts of East Texas where [Obama’s] message is just going to be lethal.” Nevertheless, that’s an awful lot of ifs.

The battle over the speaker’s post is an important one in Texas politics. In many ways, the speaker of the house has more to say about what legislation will pass than the governor. The speaker appoints committee chairs and determines the legislative agenda.

Craddick’s problems stem largely from two sources. The first are liberal and moderate lawmakers who are dissatisfied with the conservative legislation that Craddick supports and usually gets through the House. Most of these are Democrats.

The other Craddick foes are Republicans who are upset with what they regard as his strong-arm tactics. In particular, some Republicans contend Craddick’s forcing GOP



representatives from moderate districts to support measures that are unpopular with their constituents has cost the party seats in the House. They note that the Republican majority has been shrinking steadily, from 88 of 150 in 2003, to 79 today.

The Texas business community has been largely supportive of the speaker. If, however, they doubt he will be able to maintain GOP control of the House, there could be some who look elsewhere for a speaker.

Georgia: Musical Chairs in 2010?

Georgia's statewide contest this November isn't likely to provoke a great deal of excitement. US Sen. **Saxby Chambliss** (R) may have five Democrats competing in the July 15 primary for the honor of opposing him, but there's little likelihood any of them can run a competitive race against him.

But 2010 will probably be a different story. US Sen. **Johnny Isakson** (R) will be up for re-election, but the Peach State rumor mill is rife with speculation that he will step down after one term in the Senate and return to Georgia to seek the governorship. Isakson himself will only say he expects to be on the ballot in 2010, but not for which office, suggesting at a minimum that he is pondering a gubernatorial campaign. In speeches around the state, he focuses on his Washington job, including his much-discussed proposal to allow tax credits for new home buyers and a health-care proposal that would shift the cost of medical insurance from employers to the federal government, neither a state government issue.

If Isakson does opt for the governorship, the likelihood is that Lt. Gov. **Casey Cagle** (R), who has gubernatorial ambitions, would probably not run, due to Isakson's popularity. However, says **Dick Pettys**, editor of

InsiderAdvantage, SPR's sister publication, "Nobody gave [Cagle] a shot against **Ralph Reed**" in the 2006 lieutenant governor's race.

University of Georgia political scientist **Charles Bullock** says that Isakson "is a solid favorite [for governor] if he chooses to run and may clear the field."

The governorship is not a new ambition for Isakson. A state legislator, he ran for governor in 1990, losing 45% to 53% for **Zell Miller** (D). In 1996, he lost a GOP US Senate runoff, but was later elected to Congress; in 2004, he was elected to the US Senate.

If Isakson does run for governor, it will set in motion a series of vacancies in other offices, with lawmakers in both parties try to move up to a higher office, creating more open seats, and more competitive races, down the line.

There is already a growing line of potential Republican contenders for Isakson's US Senate seat, including state House Majority Leader **Jerry Keen**, state Insurance Commissioner **John Oxendine**, and US Reps. **Phil Gingrey**, **Jack Kingston** and **Lynn Westmoreland**. There is even a possibility that Gov. **Sonny Perdue** (R), with term-limited enforced unemployment staring him in the face, might decide to run for the Senate. If Perdue does run for the Senate, he would probably be stronger than any of the congressmen, given his continued popularity and statewide name ID.

Another scenario, however, has it that if **John McCain** wins the White House, Perdue might accept a position in the McCain Administration. Perdue, who won re-election with 58% of the vote in 2006, has a reputation for being a good manager, a highly sought-after skill in cabinet members, who must move in and establish control over a vast, new-to-



them, department in a matter of weeks. Should that happen, Cagle (R) would assume the governorship. Whether Isakson would run against a Gov. Cagle -- although he would be holding the office by succession -- remains to be seen. Isakson "might not run against Cagle as an incumbent," opines Bullock, due to his strong sense of party loyalty.

Several Democrats have been mentioned in this pending game of musical chairs. State House Minority Leader **DuBose Porter**, in his 12th term in the legislature, might run for governor in 2010, and trial lawyer **Jim Butler** might seek the US Senate seat.

Grits

? **Louisiana: TMI about Vitter.** During the past week or so, there's been far Too Much Information about freshman US Senator **David Vitter** (R-LA), at least in Washington, DC's political press. The staid *Washington Post* buried in a "B Section" story that alleged "DC Madam" **Deborah Jeane Palfrey**'s attorneys put Vitter on their list of potential witnesses (because his phone number appeared on a list of her clients' numbers). But the Capitol Hill newspapers that circulate in the congressional offices have put Vitter in the headlines. "Sen. Vitter's No Good, Very Bad Day," blared *The Politico*, and suggested that the Louisiana lawmaker would probably take the Fifth Amendment if he actually took the stand. The same day, *The Hill* proclaimed, "Vitter mum about inclusion on list," and speculated that Palfrey's lawyers "may be subpoenaing Vitter because they believe he will ... testify that he was calling Palfrey only for fantasy, not actual, sex." The icing on the cake was *The Hill*'s story the next day, headlined "Craig offers support to Vitter," relating that Sen. **Larry Craig** (R-SD) had come to Vitter's

defense, telling the paper that Vitter should not resign from the Senate, as some Louisiana Democrats have urged. That's the same Craig who pled guilty (then tried to it take back) to soliciting sex from an undercover policeman in a Minneapolis men's room. There was, however, some breathing room for Vitter. *Roll Call* reported that Palfrey told "an unidentified gentleman" in the courtroom and she didn't think the Louisiana senator would be called. (He wasn't and Palfrey was later convicted of running a call-girl operation.) Nevertheless it should come as no surprise that *The Politico* reported that **Tony Perkins**, president of the socially conservative Family Research Council, might run against Vitter in the 2010 Republican Primary. Perkins, a former state representative in Louisiana, was a candidate for the US Senate in 2002, finishing fourth, with 10%, behind eventual winner **Mary Landrieu** (D-LA.)

? **North Carolina: Obama Leads.** An InsiderAdvantage poll of Tar Heel Democrats showed **Barack Obama** with 51%, **Hillary Clinton** with 36%. So even if Pennsylvania gives Clinton a boost on April 22nd, she'll probably have more trouble coming her way on May 6 in North Carolina. The poll, taken April 14, showed Obama leading among black voters by 81% to 12%, Clinton leading among whites by 47% to 38%. With African-Americans accounting for an estimated 40% of the likely Democratic turnout, Obama's strong showing among blacks, combined with his respectable showing among whites, gave him a large lead. A Public Policy Polling (D) survey, taken April 5 and 6, showed a similar result, with Obama garnering 54% to Clinton's 33%. **Bill Clinton** and **Chelsea Clinton** have both been campaigning in the state, but so has **Michelle Obama**, to a large and enthusiastic crowd recently in Raleigh.