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can Steve Largent faces two challengers, Democrat Randolph John Amen and independent Karla Condray. Largent has done little in terms of campaigning, spending some of his time outside the state in an effort to support other Republican lawmakers. He also lent his support to a Washington state initiative.

The best comment on Largent's race may come from Amen, who said in a published report that his opponent seemed to be a good guy. "I might even vote for him," Amen added.

Largent's other opponent, Condray, is running as an independent, but represents the Natural Law Party, whose presidential candidate will be featured on 47 ballots across the country. The party is not recognized in Oklahoma, despite its efforts to win a place on the ballot with an unsuccessful lawsuit.

In District Two, outgoing Democratic state House Speaker Glen Johnson is challenging Republican incumbent Tom Coburn. Early predictions indicated that this would be a race to watch, and at times, it has been. In recent weeks, nonpartisan polls have indicated that Coburn, who at one time held what seemed like an insurmountable advantage, has lost some of his support, but not yet enough to ensure a Johnson victory.

Coburn has an advantage financially, but unlike some other congressional challengers, Johnson is not hurting for campaign funds, leveling the television and radio ad playing field between the two men, particularly in the latter days of the campaign.

Johnson has spent much of his time focusing on what Hall called Coburn's resemblance to "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," saying one thing at home, but doing something else while in Washington. Like many Republican campaigns, Coburn has attempted to brand Johnson a liberal, out of touch with Oklahoma.

It is in the Third District, perhaps the most watched race in the state, that Oklahomans have seen the most heated race of the election cycle. Wes Watkins, who previously held the seat as a Democrat, is vying for the seat, this time as a Republican, against Democrat state Sen. Darryl Roberts. Rep. Bill Brewster, who has held the seat since Watkins left the House, announced last year that he would not seek reelection.

Watkins holds the financial advantage in the race, but faces a big disadvantage — Running as a Republican in the heart of Little Dixie, the bastion of Yellow Dog Democrats.

That factor is aggravated further by the fact that Watkins once held the seat as a

Democrat, became an independent and won the endorsement of Ross Perot in his unsuccessful 1994 bid for governor and says that he made the switch to the GOP not only because he feels the party better represents Oklahoma but because he made a deal with the House Republican leadership that assures him a spot on the powerful Ways and Means Committee and a reinstatement of his seniority if he wins.

Roberts has attempted to use that fact to his advantage, accusing Watkins of "making a deal with the devil," specifically House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Like Coburn, Watkins has attempted to portray his opponent as a liberal. Additionally, he was stressed his record in Congress in an effort to show his understanding of Oklahoma values.

Also thrown into the mix is Scott Demaree, a little known independent and also a representative of the Natural Law Party, who is seeking the seat.

Like any election, the key to this race is the voters, specifically how many Democrats decide to cross party lines and cast their ballot for Watkins rather than Roberts. Under normal circumstances, such action would seem unthinkable, but Watkins appears to have retained much of his popularity in the district, increasing that likelihood.

The battle for Oklahoma's Fourth Congressional District may be remembered as the battle that never was. Incumbent Republican freshman J.C. Watts appears to have maintained a commanding lead over his opponent, Democratic state Representative Ed Crocker.

Crocker launched his campaign early, but was unable to overcome Watts' extreme popularity, particularly from within the Republican Party ranks. In addition to the embrace he received from the party in Washington, Watts has taken on an important role outside the Beltway, appearing as a spokesman on behalf of the party at a number of important functions, including this year's Republican National Convention.

Crocker tried to diffuse some of that popularity by focusing attention on Watts' business and tax dealings. While the effort may have struck a nerve with Democrats in the district, it fell short of swaying those within Watts' party. Additionally, Crocker faces a unique challenge in the fact that one of the district's most populous areas — Cleveland County — is now dominated by Republicans on the voter rolls.

In joint appearances, voting records are the primary topics of discussion, with Crocker doing his best to put Watts on the defensive. Watts has been able to reverse that trend from time-to-time, focusing some attention on Crocker's record in the state House.

Libertarian candidate Robert T. Murphy has livened up this race, appearing at virtually every forum involving the candidates. A vehement spokesman for one of the country's most recognized third parties, Murphy has made a point of noting the partisan differences between Crocker and Watts, asking audience members how they expect their government to accomplish anything under such circumstances.

The Fifth District seems a lock for Republican incumbent Ernest Istook, who is being challenged by Democrat James Forsythe and independent (Natural Law Party) candidate Ava Kennedy.

Forsythe, Hall notes, has put 12,000 miles on his car after getting a late start in one of the state's most heavily Republican districts.

Battling an incumbent under such conditions lessens the likelihood of a Democratic victory in the district.

Kennedy, for her part, has done her best to draw attention to her campaign, but being grossly underfunded in comparison to Forsythe and particularly Istook, it seems unlikely the outspoken Natural Law Party candidate will win many votes.

Hall said many eyes in Washington are on Oklahoma's Sixth District, where Democrat Paul Barby is challenging incumbent Republican Frank Lucas.

"Despite what some others are saying," said Hall, "I genuinely think this one is too close to call."

To his credit, Barby didn't run a campaign, but, "He had an organization," said Hall. "He tackled this at the grassroots level and won a lot of support from that. I think that really works in his favor."

Hall discredits polls that give Lucas the lead, saying non-political factors, such as Barby's sexual orientation, may make people less likely to express their support when polled, although they are likely to vote in his favor on Nov. 5.

By far the most interesting congressional race has been that for US Senate, pitting Jim Boren against Republican incumbent Jim Inhofe.

Boren surprised some political observers. See *Congressional Battles*, page 5