

Chronicle

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, center, mingles with President George Bush and District 22 candidate Shelley Sekula-Gibbs during Bush's visit to Sugar Land on Monday. Hutchison is favored by 61.1 percent of likely voters in her quest for a third full Senate term, a Houston Chronicle-KHOU-TV poll indicates.

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CHRONICLE-11 NEWS POLL

Hutchison leads Radnofsky 2-to-1

Houston lawyer struggles for name recognition against a popular senator

By **CLAY ROBISON**

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AUSTIN — Still one of the most popular officeholders in Texas, U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison leads Democratic challenger Barbara Ann Radnofsky by more than 2-1, a Houston Chronicle-KHOU-TV poll indicates.

After months of campaigning, Radnofsky, a Houston attorney making her first race for elective office, is still unknown to about half of the voters.

Hutchison is favored by 61.1 percent of likely voters in her quest for a third full Senate term, compared to 26.6 percent for Radnofsky and 5.4 percent for Libertarian Scott Lanier Jameson of Plano, according to the poll. Almost 7 percent of voters are undecided.

"It is a bad year for Republicans nationally, but there's no evidence at all that that's hurt Kay Bailey Hutchison," said pollster John Zogby.

Hutchison has a 64 percent favorable job approval rating and 74 percent of voters have a positive opinion of her, making her "well-positioned for re-election," he said.

Radnofsky's positive ratings outweighed her negative marks, 30 percent to 17 percent, but 52 percent of voters polled said they didn't know her.

Some 92 percent of Republican voters, 57 percent of independents and 24 percent of Democrats said they will

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HEAR THE VOTERS

What two Texans told the Chronicle about how they plan to vote:

For Hutchison:

•"I like Kay. I helped her get elected. She hasn't done a single thing to displease me, and the main thing is

vote for Hutchison. Radnofsky was the choice of 60 percent of Democrats, 19 percent of independents and 5 percent of Republicans.

Radnofsky led Hutchison, 66 percent to 22 percent, among black voters, but Hutchison led among white voters, 74 percent to 19 percent, and among Hispanics, 45 percent to 27 percent.

The Republican incumbent, who has been in the Senate since winning a special election in 1993, led among women voters, 57 percent to 33 percent, and among men, 65 percent to 20 percent.

Even with a majority of Democratic votes, Radnofsky was falling short within her own party, Zogby said: "In this era of hyperpolarization, a candidate has to be looking at getting 80-85 percent of their own party."

The Zogby International telephone survey of 1,003 likely voters was conducted between Oct. 23 and Oct. 25. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points. The sample was 63 percent white, 23 percent Hispanic, 12 percent black and 2 percent other.

The poll was conducted after an Oct. 19 televised debate in San Antonio among the three candidates.

In that debate, Radnofsky, in the widest exposure of her campaign, highlighted differences between herself and Hutchison on several issues, including the war in Iraq. Radnofsky has called for a timetable for withdrawing troops from Iraq, while Hutchison has supported the Bush administration's policy.

Hutchison, however, recently proposed the division of Iraq into three semi-autonomous regions, something the administration opposes.

During the debate, Hutchison said she wouldn't have supported the invasion of Iraq if she had known there were no weapons of mass destruction in the country. She also said she didn't think Bush would have ordered the invasion if he hadn't thought the former Iraqi regime had harbored such weapons.

Radnofsky has argued that Hutchison didn't study all the intelligence data that was available for senators before the invasion.

Hutchison said Monday, "I am honored to have the widespread support of Texans reflected in the Houston Chronicle poll, but the most important poll is the one the voters conduct on Nov. 7. Therefore, I will campaign vigorously until then."

Radnofsky said she believed the poll indicated she has made recent gains among voters.

"I think the trend over a two-week period is good and maybe reflective of what our attitudes are on the Iraq war," she said.

Hutchison considered challenging Gov. Rick Perry in the March Republican primary before deciding to seek re-election. She is still considered a possible gubernatorial candidate in the future or a vice presidential running mate in 2008, although in public comments she downplays both possibilities.

when you try to talk to Kay, she listens," said **Margaret Parr**, 71, a former public relations director from New Braunfels who calls herself a "Republican-leaning independent"

For Radnofsky:

- **Merritt Teddlie**, 73, a retired physician from Dallas and longtime Republican, has become disillusioned with the GOP.

"I have a very strong anti-incumbent feeling. I think she (Hutchison) is probably a nice lady, but I don't want any more Republicans in there than we have to have. Republicans are out of control and have abused their position. Not her necessarily, but I just think we need a change"

"Are we talking national ticket? For Kay Bailey Hutchison, these are 'made ya look' numbers," Zogby said.

The pollster said the Senate race revolves around Hutchison's popularity.

"This was never about Barbara Radnofsky, except maybe her setting the table for a future run (for public office)," he said.

Austin Bureau reporters R.G. Ratcliffe and Lisa Falkenberg contributed to this story.

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