

# Dems lead Senate poll

By RANDY KREHBIEL World Staff Writer  
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## Democrats appear to be in control of five races targeted by the GOP.

Democrats lead in five state Senate races key to Republican hopes for control of the Legislature, according to the most recent Oklahoma Poll.

The five seats, all held now by Democrats, include District 2 in Rogers and Mayes counties, District 12 in Creek and Okfuskee counties and District 18 in Tulsa, Mayes and Wagoner counties.

Democrats are also leading in District 16 in Cleveland and McLain counties and District 26 in southwest Oklahoma.

Also polled was Senate District 40 in northwest Oklahoma City. Some Democrats thought they might take that seat from the GOP, but incumbent Cliff Branam has a 10 percentage point lead.

Polling was conducted Oct. 18-21 for the Tulsa World and KOTV, channel 6 by Soonerpoll.com of Oklahoma City.

Republicans need to pick up three seats in the Nov. 7 general election to win control of the 48-member Senate for the first time in state history. The GOP has targeted at least a half-dozen districts with term-limited or vulnerable incumbents, but surveys of 300 likely voters in each of the six districts polled indicate Democrats may fend off the challenge.

Those findings are tempered, however, by a relatively large share of voters who are undecided. Although respondents said they intend to vote Nov. 7 and have a history of voting, many experts are predicting a low turnout.

"The undecided numbers do seem like a lot," said poll consultant Al Soltow, vice president for research at the University of Tulsa. "Two weeks out from the election, they range from 12 percent to 16 percent. The question I have is, how many of those who say they're undecided at this late date will vote at all?"

In most of the six districts surveyed, voters identifying themselves as liberals were less likely than moderates or conservatives to say they were undecided, and conservatives were most likely to say they didn't know how they were going to vote.

In District 2, held the past 24 years by former President Pro Tem Stratton Taylor, more than 48 percent favored Democrat Sean Burrage. Forty percent said they would "definitely" vote for Burrage, a partner in Taylor's Claremore law firm. Five percent said they would "probably" vote for him and 3 percent said they were "leaning" in his direction.

Thirty-nine percent favored Republican Ami Shaffer, a Claremore businesswoman. Twenty-eight percent said they would definitely vote for her.

Linda Elkins, a Pryor Democrat, said Burrage had been to her home twice, including once when "he sat out on the front porch and talked to me for more than an hour about things that were of concern to me."

She said she's voting for Burrage because "he stands for basically what I think we really need (and) he comes highly recommended by Larry Rice."

Rice is a former Mayes County legislator.

Elkins said she feared Shaffer lacked experience, but Bert Medlock of Inola thought that might be to her favor.

"I think we need a change in the Senate," he said.

Sheila Andrews of Claremore said she intends to vote for Shaffer "mainly because she's pro-life and a Republican."

In District 18, which adjoins District 2, Democratic incumbent Mary Easley of Tulsa leads Wagoner businessman Mark Wofford by almost 12 points, 49.5 percent to 38. Thirty-four percent said they will definitely vote for Easley, compared to 23 percent for Wofford.

Soltow said Easley's lead looks plentiful but pointed out that only 55 percent of Democrats said they will definitely vote for her.

"I think her numbers are a little softer than some of the others we've seen," Soltow said.

District 12 is a rematch of a 2004 House race in which Republican Brian Bingman defeated Democrat John Mark Young. Young, though, has pushed in front by 8 percentage points, in part because of greater name recognition among voters outside of Sapulpa. Young's father, John, was a state senator from Creek County and his uncle was district attorney.

"It's a well-respected name," said Robert Jones, a retired Oilton police chief. "My wife's grandmother worked for them back many years ago."

Jones said he didn't know Bingman, who like Young is from Sapulpa but works for a Tulsa oil company.

Martha Martin said she's known Young about 10 years.

"He's always been a good, honest man," she said.

Sapulpan David Jackson said he intends to vote for Bingman.

"From what I've seen, and what I've studied, his values really follow the same values I hold," Jackson said. "I am not a real partisan voter. I am a Republican; I am conservative; but if a Democrat has the same values I do, I'll vote for him."

Nearly 15 percent of those surveyed in District 12 said they're undecided.

"That one still has some possibilities for some movement, but it would take something pretty significant," Soltow said.

Jackson said if candidates have trouble getting voters to the polls, they have only themselves to blame.

"I've been very politically active in the past, but honestly, across the country candidates are going to new lows. After a while, people become so tired of that they say, why listen?"

District 16, vacated by term-limited Cal Hobson, was considered a safe Democratic seat until a bitter three-way primary that caused some Democrats to swear off nominee John Sparks. The poll shows Sparks with a 52 to 34 lead on Republican Ron Davis, with 42 percent saying they'll definitely vote for Sparks.

Elk City Democrat Tom Ivester also has a big lead in District 26, a seat held for more than 30 years by Gilmer Capps. More than 56 percent of respondents favored Ivester, with 44.5 saying they will definitely vote for him.

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**Randy Krehbiel 581-8365**  
[randy.krehbiel@tulsaworld.com](mailto:randy.krehbiel@tulsaworld.com)

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## About the poll

Soonerpoll.com conducted the scientific telephone survey Oct. 18-21 of approximately 300 likely voters in each of six Oklahoma State Senate districts.

Survey samples are based on demographic models of the districts. Respondents were selected randomly from voters who have established a frequent voting pattern.

The margin of error ranged from 5.3 percent to 5.6 percent.

The poll is sponsored by the Tulsa World and KOTV, channel 6.