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## Texas Senate race exposes Republican tensions

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Erin Mulvaney  
Reuters  
*6:18 p.m. CST, January 12, 2012*

ROUND ROCK, Texas (Reuters) - The fierce battle between the conservative Tea Party movement and establishment Republicans for control of the party is on full display in the race for a Senate seat in Texas this year and the outcome could have national consequences.

David Dewhurst, the Texas lieutenant governor since 2003, represents the establishment wing of the party in the first open Senate race in Texas in a decade.

He is being challenged by Ted Cruz, a former state solicitor general who is being backed by Tea Party groups around the country. Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison is retiring.

No Democrat has won statewide office in Texas since 1994, so the victor in the Texas Republican primary election will likely win in the November general election.

A date for the primary has not yet been finalized because of a separate court battle over how to redraw the electoral district lines in Texas.

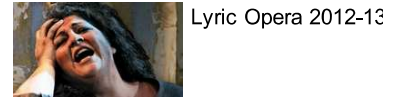
Texas is the most populous Republican-leaning, or "red" state, and has one of several U.S. Senate races where Tea Party groups are backing anti-establishment conservatives intent on pushing the Republican Party to the right.

"There is a civil war going on in the heart and soul of the Republican Party," Cruz said at a recent candidate forum in Round Rock, north of Austin. "Texas should lead the fight."

Incumbent Republican Senators Orrin Hatch of Utah and Richard Lugar of Indiana face primary challenges from Tea Party disciples. Tea Party activists are also mounting challenges to establishment candidates in races where no incumbent is running in New Mexico, North Dakota, Wisconsin and Virginia.

In Texas, Cruz has never run for office. But he was hailed by the conservative National

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contenders in the Republican primary race. Democrats command a 53 to 47 majority in the U.S. Senate, so Republicans need to gain four seats to take control of the chamber.

The Texas race has so far received little attention except for political insiders, partly because the national focus is on the Republican presidential nomination race, where Texas Governor Rick Perry is lagging.

"Dewhurst might have a Tea Party problem but it's a label and a moving target," said Jim Henson, who directs the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas. "It's too soon to tell."

A University of Texas/Texas Tribune poll of self-identified Republican primary voters released in November showed Dewhurst with the support of 22 percent of respondents, Cruz with 10 percent and Leppert with 5 percent. James had not yet joined the race. Half the respondents were undecided.

Dewhurst and Leppert, who have given significant amounts to their own campaigns, each had nearly \$4.2 million on hand as of the latest filing deadline on September 30. Cruz had about \$2.4 million on hand.

Cruz, who was Texas' first Hispanic solicitor general, is the son of a man who came to Texas from Cuba at 18 with \$100 sewn into his underpants. Cruz graduated from Harvard Law School and is a partner at a Houston law firm.

He has been endorsed by conservative groups FreedomWorks and Club for Growth - the latter bought advertising casting Dewhurst as a "moderate" - a pejorative term to conservative Republicans.

Cruz also touts the endorsements of Republican senators who back the Tea Party, including Jim DeMint of South Carolina, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, Mike Lee of Utah and Rand Paul of Kentucky. It is unclear what impact Cruz's out-of-state endorsements may have - or whether Tea Party groups can match the influence they had in 2010.

Dozens of Texas groups have endorsed Dewhurst, including the Texas Right to Life Political Action Committee, Texas Alliance for Life and the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas.

He also got a boost last week from Perry, who said in Iowa that "Lord willing," Dewhurst will soon become a member of the U.S. Senate.

Dewhurst, a Houston businessman and rancher, this week also snagged the endorsement of former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, a former presidential candidate.

Democrats have struggled to field a strong candidate. Former state Representative Paul Sadler is running after fellow Democrat Ricardo Sanchez, a retired Army general, withdrew.

Southern Methodist University Political Scientist Cal Jillson said the race is Dewhurst's to lose, even with the traction Cruz has gained among Tea Party groups.

"The Tea Party enthusiasm has waned," Jillson said. Cruz "is a talented, intelligent, articulate guy, but he has not run for public office ... Plus, campaigning in Texas is an expensive enterprise."

(Additional reporting by Nick Carey; Editing by Greg McCune and Eric Walsh)

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