

Specter picks up Democrats in Senate race

Pa. incumbent chips away at Yeakel's base of support

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LANSDALE, Pa. — Frank Cannon, 61, liberal Democrat, card-carrying member of the American Civil Liberties Union, will split his ticket and vote for Bill Clinton for president and Republican Arlen Specter for the Senate.

Cannon believes Specter was "far too aggressive" in accusing Anita Hill of perjury during the Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Clarence Thomas, but backs the veteran GOP senator for his "track record of attracting and keeping jobs in this state."

"I don't want a rookie in there when we're looking for jobs," said Cannon, a real estate developer, referring to Democratic challenger Lynn Yeakel, a political newcomer whose campaign has won backing from national women's groups.

Cannon's reasoning may indicate why Specter, seeking a third term, led Yeakel 54 percent to 38 percent in a statewide poll last week by KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh. The poll showed Specter has cut into Yeakel's Democratic base of blue-collar, black and Jewish voters.

While Specter's treatment of Hill angered some women and contributed to Yeakel's primary upset victory in April, the matter seems less important to voters this fall. A voter panel in Pittsburgh last week, organized by the League of Women Voters, rated Specter better on the subjects of the economy and education, Yeakel higher on health care.

And Sunday, in a second "Citizens Jury" in Philadelphia, 17 Pennsylvanians listened to a briefing by experts and pitches by the candidates and said Specter was better on the three issues. Yeakel's campaign complained

the process was flawed, charging lopsided ratings by pro-Specter jurors.

Still, Anita Hill remains a shadow candidate of sorts in a race being watched intently across the nation. During the primary, Yeakel used a television ad critical of Specter's part in the confirmation hearings as a springboard to victory over four Democratic opponents.

But, since Specter accused her of being a "one-issue candidate," Yeakel has been soft-pedaling the Hill-Thomas issue. And, apparently, his criticism of her inexperience is paying off.

Judy Gulas, 38, a Republican housewife from Washington Township in southwestern Pennsylvania, said, "I don't like Lynn Yeakel. I don't know why. I just don't like her." During the Thomas hearings, she said, Specter "was pretty tough on her, but that was his job."

But Cheryl Souder, 34, who lives in this Philadelphia suburb, said she will cross over to vote for Yeakel. Her disgust is less over Specter's questioning of Hill than the general way the Thomas confirmation hearings were handled.

Political analysts say — and polling shows — that Yeakel is having trouble holding what should be her Democratic base.

"I'm a Specter man," said retired coal miner Wallace Johnston of Penn Hills, who said he usually votes a straight Democratic ticket. "I think he's for the poor people."

Boyd Charlton, 69, of Plum, near Pittsburgh, agrees.

Specter, said Charlton, a retired railroad conductor and a Democrat, has "been a good man. I'll vote for the man, not the party. He's always been with labor, and I've been a labor man all my life."