

Ugly Douglas County GOP campaign alienated Republicans

By [Katie Redding](#) 11/3/09 8:20 AM



Even if the [Douglas County Republican Party](#) candidates win the Douglas County School Board election today, the battle may come at the cost of wider party support.

It's [no secret](#) that the historically nonpartisan election has become a partisan battle in Douglas County this year—not a battle between Democrats and Republicans, but one between four GOP-endorsed candidates and four candidates endorsed by the local teacher's union (two of whom are Republicans).

The campaign has been ugly for weeks, featuring high-flown Glenn Beck-style doom and gloom rhetoric and accusations.



Better times in Douglas County (dcgop)

In an [email](#) to potential funders October 22, Douglas County Republican party chairman John Ransom argued that groups with ties to “ACORN and other extreme left-wing causes” were organizing in Douglas County to help promote their school board candidates of choice.

“If these groups defeat our Republican-endorsed local School Board candidates: Doug Benevento, John Carson, Dan Gerken and Meghann Silverthorn,” wrote Ransom, “then there is no telling what else they will try to do in our County.”

Gross disrespect for Republican candidates

The vague assertions have frustrated some Douglas County Republicans. They lead, for example, to the October 13 resignation of Republican Rick Murray, captain of the Tenth District, who cited his frustration with the current GOP leadership.

“I am not breaking with my party, and will still be very active and a contributing member,” Murray explained to the Colorado Independent, by email. “I will still chair the Highlands Ranch monthly breakfast, and support candidates of my choice. I will still work with and sustain candidates who I feel have their principles and positions aligned with what I believe. Nothing will change in that area.

“I will not continue working with the present leadership of the Douglas County Republican Party, due to their gross disrespect for all legitimate Republican candidates for office. They are free to support their choice, under certain bylaw restrictions, but they are obligated by principle to respect all candidates. They have not done this, and will not receive my support in the future.

“The school board election did bring this problem to the surface, but was not the deciding factor of my resignation as a district captain. There are six Republican candidates running for positions on the board, and all

deserve the equal respect of the officers and party.”

Also in October, Republican, and Douglas County educator Mike Erickson publicly expressed his frustration with the leadership of the Douglas County Party in a [letter](#) to several news outlets, including the Colorado Independent.

“As a taxpayer, Republican, former business leader, and current educator, I am appalled at the misleading information and unethical rhetoric that has overshadowed this election,” wrote Erickson. “Instead of fostering scare tactics and political partisan gains, as a community we need to be focused on preparing our students to embrace a rapidly evolving future.” In his letter, Erickson went on to detail what he felt were falsehoods propagated by the Republican party.

At least one Republican candidate, targeted by GOP rhetoric, says she will leave the party.

“I am planning to switch my party affiliation to an unaffiliated voter, as I don’t want to be associated with the foul type of behavior that the Douglas County Republicans have displayed,” Kristine Turner wrote in an email to the Colorado Independent.

A training session for 2010

Both Turner and fellow Republican Kevin Leung have been criticized by the Republican Party since receiving the endorsement of the Douglas County Federation of Teachers. Recent [Robo calls](#), [emails](#) and [op-eds](#) have tied them to the AFL-CIO and/or ACORN, and some have alleged that the four union-endorsed candidates will unionize charter schools, promote wasteful spending, or allow the unions to control school curriculum.

“It’s just horrible,” said Leung, of the allegations being lobbied against him. Leung, a Republican, pointed out that he is a three-time county delegate. And though he received the endorsement of the [Douglas County Teachers’ Federation](#), he has not accepted any union money.

Leung likens the party’s heavy involvement in the school board election, in part, to a sort of training session for the 2010 election.

“To energize its supporters to help in this election, the Douglas County Republican Party is portraying this election as a trial run for next year by testing its new phone bank system and robocalls and mailings techniques,” he said. “The party needs to show a big win to energize its base. If we lose in our own backyard, this will be devastating.”

Turner—pointing out that in two recent elections, she received both the Republican and union endorsement—attributed the ugly politics of the race to a rightward swing of the local party.

“I think this is an effort of the far right to have control over the school board and to implement a far right agenda along the lines of charter schools and vouchers and more of a privatization of public education,” argued Turner. “And I think that is pretty common thinking.”

Turner worried that Douglas County is only a microcosm of a larger nationwide trend in which candidates have to move to the extreme right or left to earn support.

Just politics

But John Ransom, chair of the Douglas County Republican party, argued that ensuring choice in education is part of the Republican party platform.

“Typically, Democrats want one type of school,” he contended. “A union-run school, where the union dictate how everything is run, and dictate the curriculum. Republicans want to give choice and let the marketplace work it out.”

Asked if he thinks his election tactics have alienated local Republicans, Ransom said “there’s always going to be that segment of the population that’s not going to be happy.”

“Obama is considered kind of popular and he’s only got 52 percent approval rating,” he noted.

Ransom discounted Mike Erickson’s letter, for example, by pointing out that Erickson is a teacher. “I would especially think that professional educators might be a little concerned because they typically align themselves with the union,” he said.

Pressed as to whether Republican rhetoric, specifically, might have alienated GOP voters, Ransom said “I mean, that’s what political parties do. Is there anything untrue?”

Are the two union-endorsed GOP candidates really aligned with ACORN?

Ransom argued that the registered agent for a 527 campaign group that receives funding from the American Federation of Teachers, which is affiliated with the Douglas County Teachers’ Federation, is a woman who used to work for a woman who runs ACORN in Denver.

“I mean, there’s definitely alignment,” he said.