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Tuesday, November 7, 2006

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He said, she said

Or, in the case of Carlin versus Strawn, his party said, her party said

Will Klusener. Staff Writer

The negative campaigning that has characterized the 2006 election has trickled down into the 66th District legislative race.

The two candidates — Republican challenger Bob Strawn and Democratic incumbent Sydney Carlin — this week tried to reconcile their differences and called for an end to advertising by state parties that they say is misleading and ruining the election.

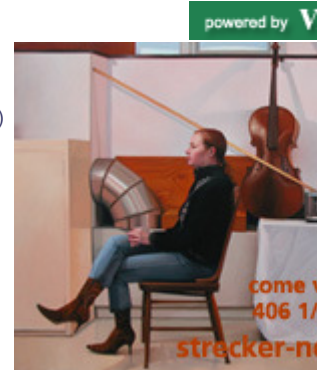
The flareup stemmed from a series of negative direct-mail postcards sent out by the Republican and Democratic parties. Both candidates say the cards are the result of unwanted interference by state level party officials.

The cards focus on hot-button issues — specifically, Carlin's position on laws regarding sexual predators and Strawn's designs on the minimum wage, eminent domain and taxation.

One card sent out by the Republican party demonizes Carlin for voting against the Child Internet Protection Act, which would make schools and libraries install Internet filters on their computers. Carlin admits she didn't vote for the bill, citing it as an unfunded mandate. "I was also asked by libraries and schools not to support it," she said.

Instead, Carlin cited other child protection bills she has supported, like a law that doubles prison sentences for second-time rape offenders, a grant to the Boys and Girls Club for a program that teaches children how to use the Internet safely, and funding for Internet filters for computers

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Also raising hackles was a postcard sent out recently by the state Democratic party accusing Strawn of supporting the use of eminent domain to seize private property for private use, and of wanting to get rid of the minimum wage. Strawn has not called for elimination of the minimum wage, although he has opposed its increase. He has called for allowing local units of government to make determinations about eminent domain, a position that is at odds with the legislation adopted last year restricting the ability of local communities to take land for private use after next June.

Carlin and Strawn both say they have apologized to each other for the mailings, and have assured each other they had asked their party's campaign officials to refrain from using their names in negative campaigns.

So far, only one card has been put out targeting Carlin, but cards targeting Strawn have continued to be mailed out. Strawn said the most recent card — one that claims he wants to raise the sales and gas tax — is false. He said he's beginning to question Carlin's sincerity.

"I'm a Republican, so of course I don't want to raise taxes," Strawn said. "I never said any of that, and I don't know where they got their information. Sydney told me she asked her party not to mail out any more of those cards, but they keep coming and I haven't got an apology from her for them.

"I think she's responsible for what goes on at this level," he said.

Carlin expressed regret this morning over the additional mailings, saying her apology to Strawn was meant to be broad and to cover any additional negative campaign ploys. She said what the party does is beyond her control.

"I'm very unhappy over this," she said. "I've asked the party not to use his (Bob's) name in any negative campaigning. I'm sorry for what's happened, but this is politics, and it's called 'hang in there and be tough.'"

Mike Gaughan, a campaign official at the Kansas Democratic Party offices in Topeka, affirmed that Carlin didn't authorize the Strawn attacks, but defended the mailings.

"The campaigns against Sydney have been particularly bloody recently, and there are things about Bob Strawn that we feel the voters should know," he said.

Republican officials said much the same. Chad Lawton, a campaign official for the Kansas Republican Party, said Strawn would not have had any prior knowledge of the negative mailings against Carlin. Lawton said he couldn't say for certain whether Strawn had asked them to stop, but said that if Strawn so requested, the party would discontinue the mailings.

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