

Elections 2014: McClintock challenger infuses drama into contest for safe GOP seat

 fresnobee.com/2014/05/05/3907180/mcclintock-challenger-infuses.html

By Christopher Cadelago

In the last few weeks, Art Moore convened with business owners at Gar Woods Grill and Pier in Carnelian Bay.

He learned about Californias bread basket from the Madera County Farm Bureau and cheered on the states Olympians at a homecoming in Squaw Valley. Moore met with seniors in Roseville, gathered with veterans in Foresthill and joined families for an egg hunt in Granite Bay. There was breakfast at Heidis Family Restaurant in South Lake Tahoe and lunch at Hog Wild BBQ in Placerville.

For Moore, 36, its all new territory as he mounts an unexpected challenge to Rep. Tom McClintock, a conservative icon in California.

A Susanville native who recently moved to Roseville from Alexandria, Va., Moore spent years climbing the ranks of the military and then in private business, with little desire for the handshaking, baby-kissing and meat-on-a-stick eating activities that define campaigns. He had never registered to vote, let alone cast a ballot in an election, adhering to a philosophy that career military officers should avoid partisan politics. He registered for the first time as a Republican in January.

But for a nonpolitician, Moores entry into the sprawling 4th District race centered in Placer and El Dorado counties has touched off a wealth of political intrigue.

He waited until the filing deadline to announce his campaign, a strategy designed to prevent McClintock, R-Elk Grove, and his supporters from recruiting a Democratic challenger. Under the states new primary system, the top-two finishers regardless of party advance to November, so Moore is now expected to spend months battling McClintock.

The incumbent has taken notice. McClintock sent letters to donors asking for contributions to help him fight what he calls a total liberal takeover of the race. He noted that in the days leading up to the filing deadline, three Democrats pulled papers for the race but withdrew.

I am facing this year a candidate who obviously coordinated with the Democrats to manipulate the candidate field in an attempt to flip this seat, he told donors in one missive. Even if its not successful, they will have caused the waste of Republican resources in a solid Republican district and pushed the Democratic narrative of a civil war in the Republican Party into the November election when we all need to be pulling together.

McClintock has offered no specifics to substantiate a plot. The facts speak for themselves, he said at a recent appearance in Rancho Cordova.

The Democrats who opted not to run Dr. Donald Colbourn, businesswoman Kris Johnson and El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago deny his assertion. Johnson blamed her withdrawal on a stress fracture and prior knee surgery that required a cane and scooter, and called McClintocks theory completely bogus.

A lot of his campaign is based on scaring people, she said.

Colbourn, a retired oncologist from Granite Bay, maintained he would make a strong candidate, but said he was uncomfortable asking people to donate to his nascent campaign. It would be great if Democrats were that clever, he said of McClintock's presumption. But it's complete fiction.

Santiago acknowledged meeting with Moore, but said she never felt pressured to drop out. They talked about issues dear to the region that she said are not getting sufficient attention from the incumbent: concerns about catastrophic wildfires and efforts to restore and enhance Lake Tahoe. Given Republicans' voter-registration edge, Santiago said, she knew she faced a steep climb. Still, she wanted to know Moore could work with local officials. I made my own decision, she said.

Having two Republicans allows for a debate to happen, Santiago added. If I was Congressman McClintock, I would be concerned about his stands on the issues, and how responsive he's been delivering to his district, rather than trying to conjure up a conspiracy theory.

The third candidate on the ballot, independent Jeffrey Gerlach, said Moore did try to persuade him not to run, something Moore's campaign does not dispute. Gerlach said he refused, citing frustrations with the lack of representation in the two-party system. With the blood-feuding mentality currently in Washington, a middle ground needs representation, he said.

Gerlach said he also heard recently from an official with the McClintock campaign, who asked him to provide his policy positions.

Incumbent seen as vulnerable

The 4th District, which takes in Yosemite and Lake Tahoe and covers 10 counties from Placer to Fresno, was not expected to produce a competitive contest this year, given its decidedly Republican bent. Since winning a squeaker six years ago over Democrat Charlie Brown (the race was so close that both candidates attended the House's freshman orientation), McClintock has had little trouble fending off challengers. But Moore contends he's vulnerable.

McClintock doesn't fight for the district's share of federal dollars, Moore said, and too often shuns constituents he doesn't agree with. Although the challenger cast himself as every bit as conservative, he said voters are not so much looking for a representative whose every position they agree with as much as someone who gives them the best chance at a functional government. Moore said, unlike McClintock, he would not have voted last year to shut down the government.

Mariposa County Supervisor Kevin Cann framed the choice as between ideological purity and practical problem-solving.

The government shutdown was paralyzing for this region, Cann said. Tom McClintock's outright reluctance to recognize that was disheartening.

Moore said the incumbent has left himself open to attacks on issues of integrity. He chided the congressman for accepting a taxpayer-funded pension despite earlier comments to the contrary and for continuing to live outside the district after pledging to move within its boundaries. McClintock, originally from Thousand Oaks, said he plans to fulfill that promise when the real estate market improves.

Moore also criticized him for spending decades in office, including 22 years in the California Legislature. He said the nation's founders envisioned businessmen, educators, soldiers and farmers to serve as representatives for a time and then to return to their careers.

Who do you think the Founding Fathers would choose in this election, me or Tom McClintock? Moore said. I think they would choose me.

During campaign stops last week, Moore huddled with Assemblyman Frank Bigelow, R-ONEals, and Sen. Tom Berryhill, R-Twain Harte, legislators who have yet to choose sides in the race. Former Rep. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, served with McClintock but is backing Moore.

That district needs someone who grew up there, so that he understands the issues of the mountains, public lands and national parks in a better way than Tom has, Radanovich said. This isnt anything personal (against McClintock). I think Art has the potential to be a great representative.

Democrats also are intrigued. At Sierra College in Rocklin, Moore was approached by Lawson Stuart, chairman of the California Democratic Party Veterans Caucus, and Democrat Jack Uppal, two years removed from a 22-point drubbing by McClintock. Uppal gently reminded Moore to focus some on appealing to non-Republican voters in the district, where 29 percent of registered voters are Democrats and 20 percent are independents.

I think you have an excellent chance, he told him. But you are going to need a lot of support from Democrats.

Rosalie Ann Wohlfromm of the Auburn Area Democratic Club offered words of encouragement and then a warning: If you become like McClintock, I am going to be really ticked off, she said.

I will, too, Moore replied.

I think hes being used

Not everyone has been welcoming. In Placer County, Republican Party officials at a recent meeting assailed Moore for taking on their endorsed representative.

We have a challenger to Congressman McClintock who hasnt even been involved in the process, and he hasnt even lifted a finger for the Republican Party, but he wants to be our congressman, said Ken Campbell, a tea party activist and central committee member for the party in Placer County.

Moore tried to interject from the back of the room. He was rebuffed, and the complaints continued.

Dennis Revell, the groups chairman, dismissed him as politically naive and said he was unprepared when he came to meet him. He said Moore didnt appear to know Revell was McClintocks ex-officio appointee to the committee or understand that the group had already endorsed the congressman.

Hes trying to do the right thing in his own mind, but I think hes being used and misled by those who are promoting him, he said.

McClintock calls Moore a Manchurian candidate who would campaign as a conservative but serve as a liberal Republican in office. He points to dozens of town meetings he has held and his relationship with many local elected officials as evidence of his close ties to the district.

The congressman also has blasted Moore for not voting, saying he doesnt accept his decision to forgo political activity as customary for military officers. Paraphrasing President George Washington, McClintock said that when we take up the responsibilities of a soldier, we do not set aside the duties of a citizen.

I dont think hes a credible candidate. I dont think theres any there there, he added. I think that when people discover that at the age of (36) he has never cast a vote, and never registered to vote until

he decided to run for Congress, its all over.

Auburn City Councilman Kevin Hanley stressed McClintock has no official claim to the seat. Still, he has been accessible and attentive to local concerns on issues such as water and timber, Hanley said. Given the nations spiraling debt, he lauded McClintock for holding the line on spending.

I want them to support a strong economy and not just go crazy and push the cost to future generations, Hanley said. Thats why we send someone to Washington to do the big things.

Moore said he decided to run for the seat after discussing the prospect with family, friends and local officials. Supporters introduced him to Rob Stutzman, the political consultant now guiding his campaign. Stutzman served as an aide and strategist for former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and ex-Rep. Dan Lungren, R-Gold River.

Placer County Supervisor Jim Holmes, who knew Moore growing up, said he has been driven since his days in the Boy Scouts.

He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and his combined 14 years of active duty and reserves service includes 30 months of overseas deployment. He returned to the region in December and is on leave as a management consultant at Deloitte.

Once you meet this man, you just know hes not fooling around, Holmes said. Hes an Eagle Scout, for crying out loud.

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