

GOP leader on lack of Swearengin endorsement for Kashkari: 'Felony stupid'



Republican candidate for state controller Ashley Swearengin sands onstage after being introduced at the California GOP convention on Friday, Sept. 19, 2014, in Los Angeles. CHRIS CARLSON — AP

The leader of the California Republican Party called Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin's decision not to endorse gubernatorial candidate Neel Kashkari "felony stupid."

State GOP Chairman Jim Brulte used the colorful description in an email sent Saturday that The Sacramento Bee obtained.

Brulte's remarks came on the second day of the state party's biannual convention in Los Angeles after Swearengin left open the possibility she will vote for Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown in November. Her non-committal comments to reporters about Kashkari after a speech on Friday night dominated coverage of the first day of the party's gathering.

In a separate email obtained by The Sacramento Bee, Ron Nehring, the GOP's candidate for lieutenant governor, complained the "main theme" of the coverage was "that of Ashley Swearengin distancing herself from Neel."

"I doubt Ashley was given the prominence of speaking Friday night (the ONLY statewide candidate to be given a speaking role other than Sunday morning ... as a platform to generate news by blowing off others on the statewide ticket," Nehring wrote. "This does NOT help the party, and it distracts from the efforts made to convey a positive theme. The coverage is not of a party expanding its reach. It's about a party that isn't unified because (its) candidates can't get it together and get on the same page."

Brulte, a former Senate Republican leader, responded that he could "yell and scream and rant and rave and tell everybody let's try to behave," but that doing so is "not my style" and that he has "no ability to enforce my will anyway."

Harmeet Dhillon, the party's vice chair, responded that she agreed with Brulte.

"I also fully support our ticket and don't think it is cool of any candidate to distance themselves from it," she wrote. "I have said nothing but good things about all of them in the media."

Aaron McLearn, a Kashkari adviser, responded to the party leaders in an email, saying Kashkari "will continue to say nice things about everyone, and I'll continue to be baffled by the Mayor's (Swearengin's) strategy. As Ron notes, it is absolutely eclipsing whatever message she and the CRP (were) hoping to deliver this weekend."

Brulte responded: "Felony stupid."

Swearengin consultant Tim Clark said Saturday night that Swearengin "needs a chance to meet with Neel and understand his vision and perspective."

"She's asking for a chance to get that time before she gives her stamp of approval," he said.

Swearengin refused on Friday to say whether Kashkari asked for a meeting at the convention.

According to the Kashkari campaign, he did.

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