

Iowa Politics Roundup: Democratic Governors Association Backed Anti-Branstad Group

Written by Lynn Campbell
Friday, 16 July 2010 14:57

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A disclosure report filed Thursday with the IRS showed that the 527 organization called Iowans for Responsible Government, which ran attack ads against former Governor Terry Branstad before the primary election, was funded entirely by the Democratic Governors Association.

The DGA gave \$782,500 to the group and is also Governor Chet Culver's largest contributor.

"We were right all along," said Branstad campaign manager Jeff Boeyink, who said the group crossed a serious line and needs to be held accountable for its actions. "We have reached a new low in Iowa politics."

Branstad, who won the GOP primary for governor, and his campaign repeatedly criticized the group led by former Iowa Democratic Party Chair Rob Tully as being a "liberal front group" prior to the June 8 election. They demanded to see the donors to the group.

Branstad finally got his "I told you so" moment on Thursday. A press release and Branstad's campaign Web site carried a large headline stating: "Exposed: Iowans for Responsible Government confirmed as Democrat front group."

Conlin Trails Grassley in Campaign Cash Despite Loans

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Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Roxanne Conlin, a successful Des Moines trial attorney, loaned her campaign another \$250,000 between May 20 and June 30, bringing her total personal contribution to \$500,000, according to a report filed Thursday with the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

"She feels she can't ask others to invest in the campaign if she is not willing to invest in it herself," said Paulee Lipsman, a Conlin campaign spokesperson.

The disclosure came the same day that the Cook Political Report moved the race between Conlin and U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) from "likely Republican" to "solid Republican," but Cook noted that Conlin's profile and personal wealth make the race worth watching. "This does not mean that there isn't the potential for this race to become more competitive, or that we won't move it in the future," the report said. "It just isn't there now."

The FEC report filed Thursday shows that between May 20 and June 30, Conlin raised \$205,720 but spent more than twice that amount -- \$472,560 -- and had \$851,014 left as of June 30. She also had \$500,000 in debts and obligations stemming from the loan to herself.

That puts her far short of Grassley, who raised \$575,451, spent \$499,822, and had more than \$5.7 million left as of June 30 for a campaign war chest that's nearly seven times as large as Conlin's. He had unpaid obligations of \$13,216.

National Groups to Bring Competing Marriage Tours to Iowa

National groups for and against same-sex marriage will be in Iowa in early August in advance of November's election, working with local groups to further their goals in what has become a battleground state for the divisive issue.

The National Organization for Marriage (NOM, a group opposed to same-sex marriage) and Freedom to Marry (a group in favor of it) will both be in the state and working with groups such as the Iowa Family Policy Center and One Iowa to get their message to voters.

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NOM has scheduled stops at the Capitol in Des Moines on August 1 and in Sioux City on August 3 as part of a tour encompassing 19 states and 23 cities that began Wednesday in Maine and will end August 15 in Washington, D.C.

Freedom to Marry also had its first stop in Maine on Wednesday, and is more or less shadowing the NOM tour.

Freedom to Marry spokesperson Sean Eldridge said that while details are still being worked out, his group will hold multiple events in Iowa around the beginning of August.

Brian Brown, executive director of NOM, said it is clear that Iowa is a battleground state for the issue.

"Iowa is obviously a key state because the people have been robbed of the chance to vote," Brown said. "The courts have imposed their will, and the legislature thus far has denied people the ability to have a constitutional amendment. So we're going to highlight the need to change the legislature, pure and simple. We're going to make sure we get legislators that let the people vote."

Brown said his group's efforts to change the makeup of the Iowa legislature will likely include independent expenditures and issue ads in key races. He also said he expects candidates to participate in the events, although he's not sure who will attend.

To counter NOM's events, One Iowa spokesperson Justin Uebelhor said, his group will be launching its "Stand Proud, Vote Proud" voter-education project with about five stops scheduled across the state. The events will be made public next week, but Uebelhor said One Iowa is planning to launch its campaign at a similar place, date, and time as NOM's appearance at the Capitol on August 1. One Iowa also plans to hold an event in Sioux City on August 3.

"We expect there will be considerable interest from supporters of equality across the state who

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want to express their contempt for NOM's hateful rhetoric and their support for equality," Uebelhor said. "It's unconscionable for an out-of-state extremist group like the National Organization for Marriage to involve themselves with taking away the freedoms of Iowans."

IASB Board Member Wants Criminal Charges

At least one board member of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) said he thinks criminal charges should be filed against former Chief Financial Officer Kevin Schick.

"This needs to be turned over to the county prosecutor," Roger Shaffer, a certified public accountant who's president of the Sumner school board, said at the IASB Board's meeting. "I think we need to be tough on this."

Shaffer later elaborated: "In my opinion, if you're taking money from our organization, [and] you don't pay it back, that's a crime. And I think it needs to be prosecuted as an example so everybody knows that if you do something wrong, you're going to pay the price for it. I'm an auditor myself. I've seen consequences of not doing that. I think that example needs to be set."

The audit shows Schick had \$11,284 of questionable spending between October 2009 and January 2010 on the corporate credit card, which included \$8,708 for a trip to Bora Bora.

"It was actually a corporate credit card," said Joe Desmond, a certified public accountant with Brooks Lodden of West Des Moines, which did the audit. "It was not a personal card as he told the Legislative Government Oversight Committee."

Detailed records of Schick's IASB credit-card spending shows he stayed at the five-star St. Regis Hotels & Resorts in Bora Bora for a cost of \$2,798. Other expenses on the corporate credit card included rental of nine RedBox DVDs, purchases at stores such as T.J.Maxx, Kohl's, Bed Bath & Beyond, and Oriental Trading Co., and meals at restaurants such as La Bamba Mexican Restaurant, Noah's Ark, Jimmy's American Café, Centro, Tandoor Authentic Indian,

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and the Irish Democrat.

While Schick told the Legislature's Government Oversight Committee that his December 27, 2009, to January 3, 2010, vacation to Bora Bora was personal and that he didn't bill the IASB during his vacation, the audit shows he did indeed bill the IASB \$800 for eight hours of work between December 28 and 31. He also billed for 40 hours between January 1 and 9, even though he didn't return from Bora Bora until January 3. "It's important to request this money back," Desmond said.

Overall, auditors and IASB board members agreed that the audit didn't reveal too much that hadn't already been disclosed. "I guess the bottom line is, there really aren't any smoking guns that we have found," said Ted Lodden, co-owner and managing shareholder of Brooks Lodden.

Gingrich Focusing on 2010 Elections Before Making 2012 Decision

Former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia insisted during his second visit to Iowa this year that his focus is on 2010 and that he plans to return here two or three more times before the November election. He added that he and his wife Callista will probably make a decision in February or March on whether he'll run for president in 2012.

"And as you can imagine, if it's a positive decision, Iowa will be among the first places to know it," Gingrich said. "I stand totally committed to spending all of this year helping elect Republicans everywhere in the country. I think that no Republican should waste any energy worrying about 2012 until we finish maximizing the size of the victory in 2010."

Gingrich made his comments to reporters at the downtown Des Moines Marriott, where he came as part of his citizen action network American Solutions to lead workshops for 50 Iowa Republican candidates. Earlier in the day, he spoke at a fundraiser breakfast for Republican Third Congressional District candidate Brad Zaun at Des Moines Christian School in Urbandale.

Gingrich also said Iowa should keep its lead role in the presidential nominating process. Visits by potential 2012 Republican presidential candidates have started to pick up, and it appears

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that Iowa will retain its first-in-the-nation caucuses that are tentatively scheduled for Monday, February 6, pending final votes by the Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee next month.

"Having the first caucus here and the first primary in New Hampshire is very helpful to the country because they are both states where you can't just buy the election," Gingrich said. "Governor Huckabee couldn't have emerged in a multi-media-market state that was very, very expensive. Jimmy Carter couldn't have emerged. I think there's a great, great virtue to having states where you've got to go out and see people face-to-face. You've got to answer their questions."

Gingrich also said in Des Moines that "the odds right now are better than even" for a Republican takeover of Congress in November.

He said he's inclined to agree with those who say that this year will be an even better year for Republicans than 1994, the year he co-authored the Contract with America before the first midterm election of President Bill Clinton's administration. Republicans took over Congress in that election, facilitating his own rise to House speaker.

"Everywhere I go, what I'm doing is saying to people, 'This is the decisive election,'" Gingrich said of 2010. "Because this is the opportunity to say to Washington that we do not want a socialist government. We do not want a machine running our country. And we do not want politicians who run over the American people. And the way you say that is you win elections. So I don't think any of us should focus on anything except this year's elections, this year's issues."

This weekly summary comes from IowaPolitics.com, an online government and politics news service. Reporter Andrew Duffelmeyer and other correspondents contributed to this report.