

"Republican Party's Flier In District 75 Race Targeted Grinnell College Voters: Resentment Lingers Over Campaign Literature."

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The sometimes bitter battle for Iowa House District 75 – won by incumbent Danny Carroll (R) of Grinnell, who outpolled his Democratic challenger Eric Palmer of Oskaloosa by 327 votes – produced campaign literature which left hard feelings on each side.

Carroll's campaign objected to fliers it said consisted of factual inaccuracies and personal attacks, while Palmer supporters said characterizations of their candidate's fiscal track record were patently untrue.

But one particular flier, produced and dropped in District 75 (but not in Grinnell) late in the campaign by the Republican Party of Iowa, has drawn displeasure from across the political spectrum in this college community.

Billed as an "Election Alert," the flier features photographs of Ted Kennedy and Hillary Clinton under the headline "Would you let these two tell you how to vote?"

Below, it reads: "Then why would you let 1,000 east-coast liberal kids elect your State Representative?"

Another headline says, "They're not from here. They won't stay here. But they're voting here," over the following text: "As part of the Democrats plan, they have registered a large number of Grinnell College students from places like New York and Massachusetts to vote in Iowa."

The piece also includes a note signed by Gentry Collins, executive director of the Republican Party of Iowa, urging voters "to take advantage of your opportunity to vote Nov. 2, so the people of Poweshiek and Mahaska Counties continue to elect a state representative that reflects your views."

College sources say roughly 12 percent of the 1,400 students are from the part of the country identified as the northeast. Roughly 50 percent are from the midwest, including 10 percent from Iowa.

Copies of the fliers began circulating in Grinnell shortly after the election, and reaction – particularly from students – began immediately.

The heads of both the campus Democrats and campus Republicans, Ben Jacobs and Joseph Gryka, respectively, last week wrote a joint letter to this newspaper saying the piece denigrated students' right to vote and calling its rhetoric "careless."

Rachel Moskowitz, writing an open letter on behalf of the multipartisan campus group Student Campaign for Increased Political Engagement, rapped the mailing for "false stereotypes and factual inaccuracies," as well as using students as a "scare tactic."

The Friday edition of the campus newspaper contained three articles on the controversy, including an editorial calling the mailing "offensive and insulting" and inviting readers to sign an on-line petition registering their objections.

Grinnell College President Russell Osgood, in a phone interview Friday said, "A lot of people are upset and they've all written or indicated to the Republican Party – and that's whose name was on that flier – that they're upset, and I'm one of them."

"I found it extremely disappointing that the Republican Party would say things that are false. Not all of our students are East Coast liberals, not all are from the East Coast, not 1,000 are from the East Coast. It's very disappointing.

"I personally have voted for people in both parties, and I think the Republican Party should set the record straight," Osgood concluded. "It's not something that should be said because it's not true."

Kristin Scuderi, spokesperson for the Republican Party of Iowa, late last week said she had not seen the flier. Collins, the party's executive director whose signature is on the piece, was unavailable for comment.

Carroll, also contacted Friday, said he was aware that the party had been working on a piece about student registration but that he did not "authorize" it and had not seen it until it was shown to him by a college newspaper reporter Nov. 11.

"It was fairly well known that the Democratic Party had a strategy of registering as many college students as possible to vote in Iowa, and it only makes sense that Iowa being a battleground state in the presidential election would contribute to that strategy," he said. "It does not seem unreasonable that the Republican party would make some attempt at countering that political strategy, and I think that is what that brochure was meant to accomplish."

Regarding students voting in Iowa, Carroll said, "I have no problem with that at all. If college students want to declare Iowa as their residence, and they want to participate in the rights and responsibilities of being a resident of Iowa, I think that's fine. We need all the residents of Iowa we can get."

Asked whether he represented the students along with other residents of District 75, Carroll said "absolutely, and I'm proud to do so."

Told that just 12 percent of Grinnell College students come from the northeast, he called the flier's demographic thesis "an unfair and inaccurate characterization."

But Carroll placed the brochure in the larger context of the 75th District campaign itself.

Clearly still smarting from what he referred to as a "scorched earth" campaign characterized by "very personal attacks" on him by the Democratic Party, he said it was time to move beyond the campaign. For his part, Carroll said he was focused on putting to rest hard feelings in preparation for his work at the Statehouse, where he prides himself on being able to work with Democrats as well as members of his own party.

"Here's what I think we should do," he said. "The election is over. This was an unpleasant experience for all involved. Let's put it behind us and move on."

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