



MEMO

Oklahoma Democratic Party • PO Box 2120 • Oklahoma City, OK 73101 • 405.427.3366

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Todd Goodman – Chair, Oklahoma Democratic Party
RE: GOP in-fighting and implications on 2010 elections

After a year full of obstructionist protests and legislation, it's clear that the far-right wing of the Republican Party is dominating their party's message. By continuing to let distractions dominate and ignore the issues most important to Oklahomans, the GOP is proving once again that their party is out of touch with the needs of the state and is squandering their opportunity to lead. Though this state of affairs is certainly not good for our state as a whole, **this does present an opportunity for the Democratic Party to distinguish ourselves going into the 2010 elections.**

Clearly the state Republican Party in our state has its priorities out of line. While we face a mounting budget crisis, cutoffs of critical services such as senior nutrition centers, and possible school shutdowns, state GOP leadership is instead fighting a civil war within their own ranks:

- Reports have surfaced that GOP state Sen. **Glenn Coffee has been using threats and intimidation to get his way in an internal leadership fight.** Fueling a three-way battle for whom will take his place as Senate Republican Leader in 2011, Coffee's actions – reported to include threats to "burn down the house" if he doesn't get his way – show he has given up on being a leader for Oklahoma, instead choosing to sit around the Capitol and bicker.
- In a recent memo, Republican Rep. **David Dank accused his colleague, Speaker Chris Benge, of abandoning the party's core principles** regarding tax policy. At issue was language Dank wanted included in House Republicans' stated legislative goals for 2010. Dank also fires at Benge for mischaracterizing his proposals during a caucus retreat.
- State GOP Chair Gary Jones, rather than focusing on the upcoming elections, is looking backward at his personal election losses in 2002 and 2006. **Jones filed a lawsuit against his former opponent** seeking to recover the personal money he poured into his sputtering campaigns and to collect damages for "mental anguish" and "loss of enjoyment of life."
- Not to be topped in tying up the court system, **Benge and Coffee also filed a lawsuit – a second lawsuit, in fact – questioning Gov. Henry's power** of line item veto. After pushing through so-called "lawsuit reform" measures, Benge and Coffee now feel the need to seek redress in the courts to settle their dispute with the Democratic governor.

Republican officials in the state have lost their focus and let bickering and extreme voices dominate, and if they continue this trend, they will lose out on their self-proclaimed opportunity to make a "clean sweep" in the 2010 elections.

This presents a tremendous opportunity for the Democratic Party in Oklahoma and its candidates to buck conventional wisdom and beat expectations. While the news media and

the vocal minority on the far-right wing have been pushing a message of GOP dominance and unity, that façade has begun to fall apart. In the meantime, state Democrats have been discussing the issues and have pointed out a lack of leadership by Republican officials – a message that will resonate more and more as Republican leaders continue to fight amongst themselves and jockey for position.

Going into the 2010 elections, Democrats must continue to be vocal about key issues and focus on the opportunities we have to move Oklahoma forward with Democrats in the lead:

- *Fiscal/budget issues:* Republicans across the nation – particularly in Oklahoma – rose to power with a tight message of fiscal discipline and accountability. However, that message has degenerated into a constant harp about handing out tax breaks (at a time we can least afford it) and a reckless approach to the state budget. **Democrats must continue to emphasize our long record of responsible spending and responsible saving.** We must continue to discuss the need to make smart investments in our state's future while preserving critical services – such as public safety – now.
- *Energy and job creation:* Though Oklahoma has been faring relatively well through the national recession, we must continue to apply past lessons and push to diversify our economy. **This means seeking out ways to attract and grow new industries,** such as "green-collar" jobs in alternative energy, but it also means bolstering – not dismantling – public education to attract businesses looking for a highly trained workforce.
- *Building infrastructure, including health care access and availability:* We can all agree there are basic things that should be available to everyone in our great state, including safe roads and bridges, clean air and water, public safety and emergency services, health care services, and a good education. **We must emphasize the need to continue to work harder – and work together – to achieve these goals for everyone.**

Conclusion: The political landscape right now is clear – state Republican officials have an unquenchable thirst not to lead, but to be in power. Because of that ambition, they are beginning to fall apart while jockeying for position. Democrats have an opportunity in 2010 to shift the political landscape by emphasizing our long history of working for Oklahomans and working to move our state forward. Democrats build the state up; Republicans are willing to tear it down in the name of winning elections. Emphasizing this can make all the difference in elections in coming years.