



October 27, 2009

Right Battles G.O.P. in a Pivotal Race in New York

By [JEREMY W. PETERS](#)

WATERTOWN, N.Y. — From a command center inside the Days Inn here, conservatives from around the country are fighting to preserve what they see as the integrity of the [Republican Party](#).

Urged on by leaders like former Gov. [Sarah Palin](#) of Alaska and [Dick Armey](#), the former House majority leader from Texas, they have come to defeat Dede Scozzafava, the Republican candidate for Congress in the 23rd District, whose views on abortion, [same-sex marriage](#) and taxes they deem insufficiently conservative for anyone running as a Republican.

They have committed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the effort and plan to run 800 radio spots, print 80,000 leaflets and recruit some 200 volunteers to work the polls on Election Day next Tuesday.

Many of the workers acknowledge that their efforts could deliver the election to the Democratic candidate, but they say it is more important to send a message than to win this race.

“This is the shot that needs to be fired to Republican leaders to wake them up,” said former Representative Marilyn Musgrave of Colorado, who was one of the most outspoken conservatives in Congress until her defeat last year.

The race, for an open seat in the far northern reaches of upstate New York, has become a contentious referendum on the party’s future, and its outcome will help shape what kinds of candidates the Republicans run as they look to rebuild their ranks in Congress next fall.

The seat — in a district where certain areas have been represented by Republicans since the 1800s, according to an analysis by the [Swing State Project](#), a political blog — became vacant after [President Obama](#) appointed

[John M. McHugh](#), the district's long-serving Republican congressman, as secretary of the [Army](#).

Ms. Scozzafava (pronounced skoze-uh-FAV-ah) has been endorsed by the Republican leadership in Congress and by former House Speaker [Newt Gingrich](#) and has received almost \$1 million in support from the National Republican Congressional Committee.

But the conservative establishment in Washington is throwing its support behind Douglas L. Hoffman, an accountant from the Adirondacks who is running on the state's Conservative Party line.

Mr. Hoffman had never run for public office, but he now counts [Steve Forbes](#), The Wall Street Journal editorial page and The National Review among his supporters.

Ms. Palin provided the biggest thunderbolt last week, when she endorsed Mr. Hoffman on her [Facebook](#) page. "Political parties must stand for something," she said. "Unfortunately, the Republican Party today has decided to choose a candidate who more than blurs the lines, and there is no real difference between the Democrat and the Republican in this race."

While third-party challenges from conservatives are nothing new for Republicans, Mr. Hoffman's candidacy is striking for the way it has galvanized the party's base.

"The No. 1 victory will be to defeat Dede," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the [Susan B. Anthony List](#), which works to elect candidates who oppose abortion.

Ms. Dannenfelser, along with members of the National Organization for Marriage, which opposes efforts to legalize same-sex marriage, are helping to coordinate efforts on the ground in support of Mr. Hoffman.

At the Days Inn on Sunday, Ms. Dannenfelser, 43, of Arlington, Va., and three other organizers from the Washington area who have temporarily relocated to Watertown joined a conference call with conservatives from across the country. A small picture of Jesus and the Virgin Mary rested on top of the television, while the Pittsburgh Steelers game played with the volume muted.

Later, they held a recruiting meeting at the hotel, distributing yard signs and leaflets to local supporters of Mr.

Hoffman. Andy Blom, 60, of Winchester, Va., told the crowd, “They say this is about the soul of the party.”

Democrats, who at first watched the Republican fracas with glee, have become more concerned about Mr. Hoffman’s chances of overtaking their candidate, [Bill Owens](#), a lawyer from Plattsburgh. The party has begun airing commercials attacking Mr. Hoffman as an out-of-touch millionaire who supports tax cuts for the wealthy.

A [Siena College poll on Oct. 15](#) showed Mr. Owens leading with 33 percent, trailed by Ms. Scozzafava with 29 percent and Mr. Hoffman with 23 percent. More recent surveys have shown Mr. Hoffman gaining, raising the possibility that the winner could capture less than 40 percent of the vote; a majority is not needed.

Ms. Scozzafava, in an interview on Monday from her campaign’s recreation vehicle, said she was trying to ignore criticisms from the conservative establishment: “All of this outside noise, it’s a distraction. But it does add a little fuel to my fire.”

Ms. Scozzafava, a former small-town mayor who now represents the area around Fort Drum, near Watertown, in the State Assembly, said that while her view of the party is more expansive than some conservatives might like, Republicans should focus on growing their numbers even if it means accepting candidates whose opinions are unorthodox.

“We shouldn’t be having a divisive debate at this time. We should be talking about the things that can unite us as a party and make us stronger as a party,” said Ms. Scozzafava, a supporter of same-sex marriage and abortion rights.

The conservatives who oppose Ms. Scozzafava have attacked her as they would a Democrat. They have tried linking her to [Acorn](#) because of her relationship with the Acorn-affiliated Working Families Party, and they have called her the candidate of big labor because of her endorsement from the New York State United Teachers Union.

The attacks have at times rattled the Scozzafava campaign. Last week, the campaign called the police after a [reporter from The Weekly Standard](#), the conservative magazine, continued to press Ms. Scozzafava to answer questions after she declined to comment. Afterward, Ms. Scozzafava was mocked relentlessly in the conservative blogosphere.

The sometimes antic nature of the race appears have to helped Mr. Hoffman, who was to be interviewed by the Fox News personality [Glenn Beck](#) on Monday.

In an interview from a sandwich and burger shop in Canastota, Mr. Hoffman said Ms. Scozzafava's nomination was a betrayal of Republican principles.

"She certainly doesn't hold the Republican values that I hold, which is smaller government, less taxes, fiscal responsibility and not spending money you don't have," he said.

Many of the conservatives who support Mr. Hoffman have said that Republicans will suffer if they do not nominate candidates who support the party's ideals.

"I think the Republican Party missed its first big opportunity to differentiate itself from big government liberalism and get back to being the party of Reagan," said Mr. Armev, who now heads the FreedomWorks Foundation. "When we're like us, we win. And when we're like them, we lose."

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: October 28, 2009

An article on Tuesday about an effort by conservatives around the country to defeat the Republican candidate in a Congressional race in upstate New York erroneously attributed a distinction to the race. It is one of two Congressional races to be decided next week (the other is in California); it is not the only one.

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