

April 1, 2010

Mud Flies in Round Rock as Primary Leader Fights Loose Cannon Allegations in Bruising GOP Runoff

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A Texas House hopeful's campaign north of Austin is being dogged by tales of arrests, violent threats and temper tantrums while he portrays his opponent as desperate, deceptive, beholden to a single contributor and unqualified to hold the job they're both seeking as a GOP primary battle that had been relatively tame turns increasingly vicious as the runoff election nears.

While the Republican primary competition for a shot this fall at Democratic State Rep. **Diana Maldonado** of Round Rock started showing signs of getting negative before the March 2 election, the fight between GOP rivals **John Gordon** and **Larry Gonzales** has degenerated in the past few days into one of the most vitriolic runoff races for the lower chamber in 2010.

Gordon, an engineer and longtime GOP activist who led a four-candidate pack in round one with 41 percent of the vote, fired the first shots in the runoff with radio ads that ripped Gonzales as a candidate who'd been bankrolled by Houston homebuilder **Bob Perry** and had no record of involvement in the local party or the community he wants to represent in the Legislature.

Gonzales, who claimed a spot in the April 13 runoff with 38 percent of the vote last month, countered with a vengeance when he aired a new radio spot this week that describes Gordon as a "ticking time bomb ready to explode" after running through a list of allegations and incidents that run the gamut from eccentric to belligerent.

The Gonzales ad refers to criminal and civil cases from 1994 when Gordon was arrested and fined for damaging a parking boot near the Capitol and accused on a separate occasion of threatening to beat up a House candidate at the local party headquarters when he was the Williamson County Republican chairman. The spot that the Gonzales campaign has been broadcasting on KLBJ radio in the Austin area goes on to say that Gordon once hired a private investigator to track a female opponent, sued the Round Rock School District and jammed up the judicial system by going to court to fight numerous traffic tickets.

The Gonzales ad mentions a nine-minute video that's been circulating on the Internet that shows a traffic stop six months ago in which a Round Rock police officer called for backup help while describing Gordon as "screaming" and "irate" after he'd pulled over his wife for failing to signal a turn with her car blinker.

Most of the events that Gonzales documents in the radio commercial are contained on a web site called thetruejohngordon.com. While Gordon contends that his runoff foe's campaign is responsible for the web site even though there's no disclaimer or record of such an expenditure on the candidate's finance reports, Gonzales denies the connection.

Gordon, the self-styled father of the Republican Party in Williamson County where he played a major role in the GOP's establishment and development, has contended that Gonzales would have to answer to Perry as a legislator after receiving more campaign cash from the Houston builder before the March election than the total amount of money he spent on the first round. Perry, who's been the number one contributor by far to Republican candidates in Texas during the past decade, and his wife donated \$90,000 combined to Gonzales for his debut House race before the initial election last month. Gonzales raised \$132,000 before the primary election and

reported spending \$82,000 during the first round while Gordon had \$132,000 with a significant percentage of that coming from himself. Gordon spent \$90,000 on round one.

Gordon also asserts that Gonzales only direct connections to the GOP have been as an aide at the Capitol and as a direct mail consultant who owns a print shop where Republican candidates have had campaign materials produced. .

Gonzales "has never done anything in our county or community," Gordon told *Capitol Inside*. "He may be some hotsy totsy guy at the state Capitol. But all he's ever done is when somebody has been paying him. He's just a hired gun."

Gonzales disputes that characterization, noting that he's had various leadership positions with the area chamber of commerce and the PTA in addition to coaching a local girls softball team - and he contends that Gordon has attacked him repeatedly with "innuendo and inferences" that are designed to give an impression that simply isn't true. ,

But Gordon argues that Gonzales and his supporters are guilty parties when it comes to only telling one side of the stories that are making the rounds in political circles on the GOP runoff fight in the HD 52 race. Gordon - for example - said the Austin Police Department admitted it had made a mistake when an officer gave him the ticket that culminated in the charges of damaging public property 16 years ago. Gordon said APD refused to refund the \$800 fine he paid even though it had conceded that it had overstepped its authority when issuing tickets in the area surrounding the Capitol where the DPS had jurisdiction.

Gordon said the charges in the legal document in which he's accused of threatening to "beat" a man "to pieces" had been refuted by witnesses who were at the Williamson GOP office at the time of that particular incident. Gordon said the man in question, **Leo Wood**, had cooked up the allegations as a way of getting a judge to force the party to accept his application to run for the HD 52 seat after it had been rejected because it wasn't filled out properly.

Gordon, an ally and former staff member for **Mike Krusee**, a Round Rock Republican who represented HD 52 before stepping down after the 2008 election, said Wood had shown up shortly before the filing deadline to file to run for the seat when Krusee was seeking re-election for the first time. Gordon said Wood had told Krusee earlier that he wouldn't run against him in the House race with the agreement that Krusee would back his wife for county treasurer that year. After a court ordered the local party to accept Wood's application for the House race, Krusee beat him in the primary with 65 percent of the vote.

Gordon said that he and Krusee are still good friends - and while the former lawmaker has stayed out of the campaign this year as a result of his role now as a lobbyist - his son has been helping out in his bid for the House.

Gordon said the video on the September traffic stop fails to make it clear that the candidate was pointing out to the officer that he'd forced his wife to pull off the road at place that was dangerous at a time when it was raining and they had their two young granddaughters in the car with them. The officer had planned initially to give Gordon's wife a warning before changing his mind and writing a ticket instead after the exchange with the candidate in the passenger side of the vehicle.

Gordon sought the House seat two years ago after Krusee decided to give it up without a re-election bid. But Gordon failed to make a GOP primary runoff when he received 29 percent of the vote while **Dee Hobbs** and **Brian Daniel** qualified for the second round with 32 percent and 30 percent respectively. Daniel won the runoff before losing to Maldonado by a narrow margin in the November general election in 2008.

There's speculation that Maldonado has been urging supporters who didn't cast ballots in the Democratic Party last month to turn out for the GOP runoff and to vote for Gordon because she thinks she would have a much better chance against him in her first re-election bid this fall than she would in a battle with Gonzales.