



# Tea party feels shunned with red stars from Campbell GOP

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A red star put on the corner of the index cards for some of those who attended the Campbell County Republican Party elections on March 3 has angered some tea party members.

The Campbell County Republican Party wouldn't elect anyone with a red star on their card to any leadership position in the party.

Those who signed the petition last year to put Libertarian state treasurer candidate Ken Moellman on the ballot received a red star.

But some tea party members believe they were the intended target.

The election in question happened at the Campbell County Republican Convention where the leaders of the Campbell County Republican Party are elected and precinct leaders are chosen. The Republican and Democrat parties on the county, district and state level will re-organize this year and elect leaders and choose delegates.

Erik Hermes, the past president of the Campbell County Tea Party, said he filed an appeal Friday with the state Republican Party seeking to invalidate the results of the Campbell County GOP election.

Campbell County Republican Party leadership, however, said the red star didn't signify the tea party but rather signified those who violated the Republican Party of Kentucky's preamble that requires "devotion to our party's principles and loyalty to its candidates."

Hermes signed the Moellman petition and received a red star on his index card identifying him and his precinct in Cold Spring where he lives. Hermes said he nominated himself to be a precinct chairman.

"I was then told to show my card," Hermes said. "When it had a red star on it, I was told I was ineligible, and specifically told it was because of signing the petition for Ken Moellman."

The red star had nothing to do with tea party affiliation, said Jeff Kidwell, chairman of the Campbell County Republican Party. Kidwell said only seven people out of 167 who attended received a red star. Hermes said it was at least eight.

The party elected some tea party members, including Campbell County Tea Party President Larry Robinson, as precinct chairpersons, Kidwell said. Others, even those with a red star, were elected delegates to district convention in April, he said.

The county Republican Party wanted to ensure people who hold leadership positions in the party will represent the wishes of Republican members, Kidwell said.

"It is right in the preamble in the rules," Kidwell said. "The qualification for holding Republican leadership positions is loyalty to the candidates. It is not too much to ask to at least be loyal to the candidates of the party they are trying to lead."

The GOP officials in Campbell County also gave red stars to those who financially supported other candidates, said Kevin Sell, Fourth District GOP chairman and chairman of the March 3 meeting where the county GOP officers were elected.

"I can't help it if they don't read the rules before they sign a petition or help another candidate," Sell said. "There's been loyalty language in the rules for awhile. For anybody in an organization, especially a political organization, you have to be on the team or not. You can't play both sides."

Hermes claims some who signed Moellman's petition but not active in the tea party did not receive red stars.

Sell said the loyalty clause ensures the leaders of the party will continue to support the party's candidates. It doesn't prevent party members who aren't leaders from supporting other candidates or doing what they want.

"You can run and do what you want, support who you want, but don't be a member of the organization and run for leadership when you help the other side," Sell said. "That is a reasonable expectation."

Jack Decker, of Claryville, differs and believes Republican leadership feels threatened by tea party members. Decker, an active member of the Campbell County Tea Party who also signed Moellman's petition, said he also received a red star.

"I think some of the people believe the tea party was trying to take over the Republican leadership," Decker said. "That's not true. All we wanted was a voice in it. Because of the way we were treated, it has created an opposition."

Duane Skavdahl, president of the Northern Kentucky Tea Party, said they haven't yet had problems in other counties in Kentucky, but many haven't had their elections yet. Boone County's was on Saturday. It could become an issue in the Republican Party if what happens in Campbell County happens across the state, Skavdahl said.

"There are certainly people who appear they just want the tea party to go away, or they would like us to go out there and do whatever we can to go get the votes and then disappear and not have any voice in anything," Skavdahl said.

Moellman on the day of the Campbell County GOP Convention wrote an open letter tea parties in Kentucky in response to the red stars. He apologized for an inconvenience his petition may have caused them and encouraged people to look at "alternative paths" including the Libertarian Party. Moellman said a signature on his petition wasn't an endorsement but simply meant people thought he had a right to run.

"I can tell you for a fact, when some people signed my petition, they told me to my face they were not going to vote for me, but that I had a right to be on the ballot," Moellman said. "From my perspective, a signature on the petition, it is not in any way shape or form an endorsement of the candidate. A signature meant this person has the right to run."

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