

Posted on Sat, Oct. 9, 2010

John Adler denies allegation he recruited third-party candidate DeStefano

By Cynthia Burton

Inquirer Staff Writer

U.S. Rep. John Adler denied allegations Friday that his campaign recruited a so-called sham candidate to siphon votes.

Local tea party groups have endorsed Runyan, the former Eagles tackle who is running for his first political office.

The Independence Hall Tea Party, a regional group, said it expected to stage a demonstration against DeStefano at a fundraising event he was to hold Friday night.

The West Jersey Tea Party plans to sue the Adler campaign and the state to have the congressional ballot "struck down and then reprinted, dropping the name of DeStefano," according to a statement from the group.

Adler won the Third District, which cuts through Burlington and Ocean Counties and includes Cherry Hill in Camden County, in 2008 thanks to a gradual change in voter demographics and a surge of support for presidential candidate Barack Obama.

Last year, however, the district returned to its Republican roots and favored Christopher J. Christie for governor.

Independent polls show a tight race, with support for DeStefano in the single digits.

"Theoretically, a tea party candidate should take [votes] from the Republican," said Sharon Schulman, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College.

If the claim that Adler's people recruited DeStefano "turns out to be true," she noted, "I'm not sure which way it would go. It's still an 'unnamed sources' thing, so I'm still skeptical."

The race has become increasingly bitter. Last month, Adler's campaign dispatched a photographer to take pictures of Runyan's Mount Laurel home. Runyan's wife, Loretta, followed the photographer and told Evesham and Mount Laurel police that he had upset her daughter.

Since August, Adler's campaign has run ads that show Runyan's gated home and accuse him of passing the property off as a farm to score a \$20,000 tax break. The same allegation - and pictures of Runyan's home - was made in brochures mailed by the New Jersey Democratic State Committee.

Adler said Friday that the photographer whose behavior Loretta Runyan objected to was no longer associated with his campaign.

Having him shoot more pictures "was overkill, because we had photos of Mr. Runyan's mansion where he doesn't pay taxes on time," Adler said.

Runyan grazes four donkeys on his property and cuts timber, which allows him to pay less than \$500 in property taxes on 20 acres of land surrounding his home. He pays \$57,000 in property tax on the five acres where his house sits. He is taking advantage of the farmland assessment program, which allows farmers to pay reduced taxes in an effort to preserve open space.

During the primary, in an effort to dismiss the issue, Runyan held a news conference and acknowledged that had been late in paying his property taxes multiple times.

© Copyright | Philly Online, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Any copyin