

## ***GOP hopeful urged to exit race over letters targeting Latinos***

San Jose Mercury News (California)

October 20, 2006 Friday

Copyright 2006 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

**The Mercury News**

Found on BayArea.com

**Section:** A; Pg. 1

**Length:** 932 words

**Byline:** Sonya Geis, Washington Post

### **Body**

---

An Orange County Republican's congressional campaign went into meltdown Thursday after he said a staff member was responsible for sending thousands of letters to new voters with Latino surnames telling them -- wrongly -- that it is illegal for them to vote if they are immigrants.

The Orange County Republican Party immediately called for Tan Nguyen, the GOP candidate for California's 47th district, to withdraw from the race after it concluded he approved the mailing. Nguyen, who has scheduled a press conference today to respond, said Thursday that a staff member had sent the letters without his knowledge and has since been fired.

Nguyen, himself an immigrant from Vietnam, has focused his campaign on keeping illegal immigrants out of the country, a deeply felt issue in Orange County.

"The mailer was flawed and ill-conceived," Nguyen said. "I will do whatever I can in the weeks before the election to encourage all citizens in this district to exercise the most important of their democratic privileges."

As many as 14,000 letters were sent in the district, now represented by Democratic Rep. Loretta Sanchez of Garden Grove. The letterhead identified them as coming from the anti-illegal immigration group California Coalition for Immigration Reform.

The group immediately denied responsibility, noting that the letterhead did not resemble its official letterhead and appeared to be forgery.

Written in Spanish, the letters advise recently registered voters that it is a crime for those in the country illegally or immigrants to vote in a federal election and that offense could result in jail time or deportation. They also say the federal government has a new computer system to verify voter names, and that anti-immigration organizations can access the records.

Adult immigrants who are naturalized citizens can, in fact, vote and none of the other assertions made in the letter are true.

Orange County Republican Chairman Scott Baugh told the Associated Press that his group asked Nguyen to withdraw after concluding he was aware of and approved the letter -- charges Nguyen denied.

## GOP hopeful urged to exit race over letters targeting Latinos

"I learned information that allows me to draw the conclusion that not only was Mr. Nguyen's campaign involved in this, but that Mr. Nguyen was personally involved in expediting the mailer," Baugh said.

"I did not do this. I did not approve of any letter," Nguyen said.

Baugh, who called the letter "obnoxious and reprehensible," said his group's executive committee voted unanimously to ask Nguyen to drop out.

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer launched an investigation into violations of two state laws against intimidation to suppress voting. On a local radio program, Lockyer confirmed that his office was focused on a Republican congressional candidate. An aide to the attorney general said the investigation is ongoing and declined to comment further.

Sanchez said she has called for a federal probe into violations of the Voting Rights Act. "We would like to find who did this and have them prosecuted," she said.

"If it is in fact this guy, the most disgusting and saddest thing about it is that it comes from another immigrant," said Sanchez, who was born in the United States to Mexican parents, whose 1996 election signaled Orange County's increasing diversification. "These communities have spent years trying to get naturalized immigrants to vote."

Local Republicans have largely ignored the race, though Sanchez's seat is not normally considered safely Democratic. The district narrowly went for Bush in the 2004 election.

Nguyen, 32, was unknown to local Republicans until he beat out a favored candidate to face Sanchez. Less than two years ago, Nguyen ran as a Democrat trying to unseat Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach.

"When I interviewed him to determine why he was becoming a Republican, I was less than convinced that he switched parties because he doesn't believe in the values of Democrats," Baugh said. "He wanted the Republican Party to carry him across the finish line, and I told him that's not how it works."

Nguyen has spent \$427,000 of his own money in the race against Sanchez by September, according to campaign filings.

His campaign materials describe immigration as the focus of his campaign. He praises the Minutemen Project and opposes President Bush's guest-worker program.

Nguyen immigrated to the United States at age 8, one of thousands of Vietnamese to flee their homeland in boats to escape the communist government. He worked as a stockbroker before entering politics.

Orange County is known for heated immigration politics. One-third of its residents are Hispanic, according to 2004 Census data, and the area is home to large populations of Vietnamese and Middle Eastern immigrants. It also is the birthplace of several anti-immigration movements.

"Certainly this is a very polarized area," Sanchez said. "When you have people like the creator of the Minutemen living there, and Gloria Tuchman, who worked on the anti-bilingual law . . . one would say that it's a pretty volatile area."

This is not the county's first dispute over alleged intimidation of Latino voters. In 1988, Republican Assembly candidate Curt Pringle posted uniformed "security guards" at 20 predominantly Latino voting places in Orange County.

Republicans said the guards were stationed to prevent non-citizens from casting ballots. The FBI investigated the incident. No criminal charges were filed, but Pringle and nine other defendants paid \$400,000 to settle a civil rights lawsuit alleging voter intimidation.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** US REPUBLICAN PARTY (92%); IMMIGRATION (91%); VOTERS & VOTING (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (89%); LETTERS & COMMENTS (89%); POLITICAL CANDIDATES (89%); INVESTIGATIONS (88%); CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS (86%); ATTORNEYS GENERAL (83%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); POLITICAL PARTIES (78%); ELECTIONS (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); ELECTION LAW (78%); US FEDERAL ELECTIONS (78%); CIVIL RIGHTS (77%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (77%); APPROVALS (76%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (73%); PRESS CONFERENCES (70%); LAWYERS (69%); FEDERAL INVESTIGATIONS (69%); JAIL SENTENCING (64%); HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIL LIBERTIES LAW (60%); COUNTERFEITING & FORGERY (50%)

**Industry:** LAWYERS (69%)

**Person:** LORETTA SANCHEZ (58%)

**Geographic:** CALIFORNIA, USA (93%)

**Load-Date:** October 20, 2006