

Chabot, Schmidt appear to stretch truth in letters

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Both stand by charges against Driehaus, Wulsin

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WASHINGTON – As political candidates often do, U.S. Reps. Jean Schmidt and Steve Chabot sent out fundraising letters recently, urging supporters to send them donations.

But these letters also attack their Democratic opponents in ways that seem to stretch the truth – with Schmidt accusing her opponent of participating in "grotesque medical experiments" and Chabot suggesting his opponent supports abortion, though he is anti-abortion.

Both Republicans said they stand by the letters, but political analysts say the harsh tone is a sign that Schmidt and Chabot know they are vulnerable.

"For these incumbents, they have to raise a lot of money and they have to make sure, more than anything else, that their base turns out for them," said Chris Kelley, who teaches political science at Miami University. "In both of those letters, they use phrases or words that are designed to push buttons."

Schmidt of Miami Township, Clermont County, wrote that she "critically" needed respondents to rush her a special contribution because "national Democrats" and the "rich, ultra-liberal special-interest groups" are out to take her down.

She then attacked Indian Hill Democrat Victoria Wulsin for not sharing common values, such as respect for human life.

"Wulsin's contempt for the culture of life has even led her to participate in grotesque medical experiments," the letter said. "Wulsin was paid for her work in medical 'studies' where victims of AIDS in Africa and China were, without their consent, injected with the malaria virus."

But Wulsin campaign spokesman Kevin Franck said Wulsin did not "participate" in any experiments.

Wulsin, a physician, was hired in 2004 by the Heimlich Institute to do a literature review of experiments and studies linking the malaria bacteria as a treatment for HIV/AIDS but did not inject anyone, he said. "She was never directly involved in any experiments," Franck said. "These two sentences are false the way they are worded."

Bob Kraft, a spokesman for Dr. Henry Heimlich, founder and former president of the institute, confirmed that Wulsin worked for the institute, but he said she was hired as a consultant for a few months and was never a full-time employee.

Asked if Wulsin conducted any experiments or participated in the experiments that the Institute was involved in, Kraft said: "No, she did not. She conducted a literature review of malariotherapy."

Still, Schmidt chief of staff Barry Bennett defended the letter, and its contents.

"She did a peer review of experiments, so she was a participant. No one is accusing her of doing the injections or anything else," Bennett said, adding that the letter was "100 percent factual" and contained "carefully chosen words."

Meanwhile, Joan Wehrle, a spokeswoman for the State Medical Board of Ohio, said Wulsin's medical license is active and lists no disciplinary action.

Robert S. Baratz, president of the National Council Against Health Fraud, has said he asked the Ohio Medical Board to investigate Wulsin on charges that she "covered up unethical medical experiments."

Wulsin's campaign said she met with the board in Columbus on April 24 to discuss the complaint, and it was dismissed.

But Wehrle said she couldn't confirm that the complaint had been filed – or dismissed. Under Ohio law, complaints received or investigated by the board are confidential and are made public only if disciplinary action is initiated or taken, she said.

Chabot's letter, dated May 19, also had an urgent tone. In it, Chabot wrote that "there are storm clouds on the horizon" on the issue of abortion because his opponent, Price Hill Democrat Steve Driehaus, had invited House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., who supports abortion rights, to a fundraiser in Cincinnati.

"The Democratic leadership in Congress will stop at nothing to try to defeat me and other pro-life Republicans and replace us with liberals who share their misplaced and dangerous views," the letter said.

There's just one problem: Driehaus, also a Catholic, opposes abortion.

"It interests me that he's so concerned about his base – pro-life Catholics – that he has to disparage me like this," Driehaus said.

He added: "I think people reject that type of politics. I think people are sick and tired of this type of politics."

Chabot defended his letter.

"It's absolutely fair. And completely accurate," he said, adding that even if Driehaus opposes abortion, he would be working with and putting in charge Democratic leaders who support abortion rights.

"By keeping them in charge, in essence, we're making sure that pro-life votes are without a question at a disadvantage," Chabot said.

Political experts say these types of fundraising letters are used frequently by lawmakers to frame their opponents and incite their base.

"Such appeals work because they fit the concerns and fears of the recipients, who read the appeals privately," said John Green, director, University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute for Applied Politics. "And the letter gives the recipient something they can do immediately to respond to the concerns raised: contribute money."

Kelley of MU said the letters are not only designed to secure money, but to frame the opposition, using certain terms so candidates can motivate their base and make sure they vote.

"This is a nice preview of what we'll see in TV ads this fall," he said.

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