

Absentee ballot push has GOP ally

Clerks ... should do everything they can to increase voter participation.

— Candice Miller, former secretary of state



MILLER

Rep. Miller sides with Democratic clerk being sued by Republicans

By Chad Selweski
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Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh has received a boost in her legal battle with the Republican Party — a fight over distributing absentee ballots — from one of the state's

top Republicans, U.S. Rep. Candice Miller. Miller, who served eight years as secretary of state — Michigan's top elections official — said she supports Sabaugh's effort to conduct a mass mailing of absentee ballot applications to all Macomb seniors prior to each election. "Clerks, by their very job description,

should do everything they can to increase voter participation," said Miller, who served as secretary of state until 2002, when she was elected to Congress. "I... don't have a problem with what she's doing."

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BALLOTS: Clerk wants applications mailed to seniors

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Sabaugh is asking each of Macomb's 24 cities and townships to boost voter turnout by mailing "unsolicited" ballot applications to all voters over age 60. In those communities that decline, the county will conduct the mailing.

The legal dispute dates back to 2006, when the Republican Party filed suit claiming the practice was illegal. When Sabaugh scored a victory in Macomb Circuit Court, the GOP took the case

to the Michigan Court of Appeals, where it's still pending. In a motion filed last month, the Republicans asked the appeals court to rule quickly and block Sabaugh from conducting a blanket mailing prior to the May 6 election.

Miller, a Harrison Township Republican, said she sees no reason why Sabaugh should be stopped from conducting the unsolicited mailings since the county Board of Commissioners approved the project and allocat-

ed up to \$60,000 to pay for it. The congresswoman's remarks came in an interview with The Macomb Daily.

When told of Miller's stance, Sabaugh said she was pleased that the lawmaker put an emphasis on voter participation ahead of her partisan loyalties.

"I wish she would use her influence to stop the Republican Party lawsuit," said Sabaugh, a Warren Democrat. "What a waste of money."

Miller said absentee voting is a valuable, convenient way to cast a ballot but she expressed one reservation with Sabaugh's plan. She cited concerns by local clerks that voters will be confused if they receive one absentee ballot application from the county and one from the municipality.

Sabaugh's staff has assured that confusion can be avoided by

using a computer database to pinpoint which seniors have requested an absentee ballot and eliminate their name from the blanket mailing.

Since Sabaugh launched her bid in January to conduct mass mailings in the 2008 elections, only seven communities have agreed to participate. The clerks in Clinton Township, Harrison Township, Lake Township, Lenox Township, New Baltimore, Richmond and Roseville will mail applications to all their senior voters.

If no other municipalities sign on, the county will conduct the mailings in the remaining communities. The May 6 election features a ballot proposal seeking to create an executive style county government. In addition, school board candidates are running in 11 school districts.

A spokeswoman for the Michigan GOP had no immediate response.



SABAUGH

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