

Running for Congress in Orange County

Union president and Republican candidate for office

It's not unheard-of for a teacher to run for office in California, even for Congress. But it's much less common for a union leader to do so as a Republican. Then again, Coast Community College District instructor Rob Schneiderman is not your common Republican.

"We are a red district," he says, referring to the fact that Congressional District 45, in the heart of Orange County, put its current representative, Mimi Walters, into office with a 53,000 vote edge over her opponent in the last election. "But I don't think Walters and the Republican Party establish-

up for her own constituents, even in the face of an order that was so clearly unethical and illegal. It was on the drive home that I decided to do something about it." His answer: run against Walters in next year's election.

The other event that pushed Schneiderman to become a

candidate was the campaign against Orange Coast College instructor Olga Cox, organized by Republican Party activists to punish her for criticizing Trump in her class after he was elected. She was secretly recorded, and received such serious threats that she couldn't come to work for a time (see article on page 8).

"That really showed me how far right the Republican Party has gone," Schneiderman explains. "The vicious phone calls and online posts from flag-waving Republican activists really shocked me. I thought, someone has to take the country back from the extremists." He decided, however, that the most effective challenge to Walters would be from within the Republican Party. He abandoned his previous stance as "No Party Preference," registered Republican, and launched his campaign. "I'm a modern Republican," he emphasizes, "fiscally conservative and socially progressive."

of Educators, AFT Local 1911, which represents over 1000 faculty members from Orange Coast College, Golden West College, and Coastline College. He's active in the California Federation of Teachers, and is a delegate to the Orange County Federation of Labor.

His platform, announced on his campaign webpage (<https://rob4ca45.com/>), calls for defending public education and ensuring students can graduate from college debt-free. He supports women's right to choose, and promises to speak out against the campaign to defund Planned Parenthood. He says he will oppose legislation that accelerates global warming and wants to protect the EPA. He attacks Trump's anti-immigrant measures.

Prop 55 got Republican votes

To Schneiderman, fiscal conservatism means prioritizing government spending. "We cannot wage war and massively increase military spending while reducing revenue," he says. "This lack of fiscal discipline leads to massive deficits. I would prioritize education and infrastructure projects (roads and bridges) instead of wasting money on a wall between the USA and Mexico."

There's no reason why a Republican candidate can't stand up for the economic needs of working people, he believes, instead of betraying them. "My grandparents worked hard, and we followed the rules. Now Wall Street businesses have realized they can make lots of money taking advantage of people, like the private colleges that prey on people who want the American Dream. Donald Trump said he'd help them, and instead he appointed Betsy DeVos, who's now trying to ease the rules on loan servicers. Only the hard right thinks that's a good idea. These are the climate deniers. Some even came to our board of trustees meeting last week, and booed a biology professor who talked about the danger of climate change."

No contradiction

Schneiderman sees no contradiction between his union activism and his Republican Party candidacy. He is president of the Coast Federation

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ment here actually represent the thinking of most of our district's voters."

The district's biggest city is Irvine, a university town with a solid Democratic majority. South towards Laguna Hills and Mission Viejo, though, the voting population turns much more conservative.

Big immigrant communities

Yet in the last election, Donald Trump lost to Hillary Clinton here. "He's very unpopular, and people are very offended by his xenophobic ways," Schneiderman charges. "There are big communities here of immigrants from China, Korea, Iran and even Syria."

An 80-year-old neighbor two doors down from Schneiderman's house was caught in Trump's first order banning Muslim immigrants, when her family from Iran was barred from visiting her, as they've done every year. Another neighbor, from Syria, couldn't bring his father to visit.

"When I heard their heart-breaking stories, I went to the LAX airport to protest, along with thousands of others. But our Congressional Representative wouldn't stand



Rob Schneiderman, president of the Coast Federation of Educators, AFT Local 1911, is running for Congress as a Republican in Orange County.

Republicans in our district."

So why not run as a Democrat? His answer: "I'm hoping that a huge swath of the Democratic Party is realistic enough so see that it has an extraordinarily small chance of winning in this district. While they have three strong candidates and have opened a field office here, they've never been able to win in a district where the other party has more than a 10-point advantage. So the question really is, do you want more of Mimi Walters, or are you willing to elect a Republican who will be a real alternative?"

He points out that Walters does not waste her resources campaigning against the other party. "She spends all her money fighting off Republican challengers, not Democratic ones."

Party registration in CD 45 is about 42% Republican, 31% Democratic, and 27% No Party Preference/other. In all previous elections, the No Party Preference/other has voted heavily Republican. However, according to Schneiderman, in the Republican primary at least 20% of voters normally cast ballots against the front-runner, Walters in this case. If Democrats making up another 20% of voters cross over to vote for him, that combination is enough to put him into the fall election, head to head against Walters. In California, the two top vote getters in the primary run against each other, even if they're from the same party.

"At that point we'd need a huge budget to win," he acknowledges. "During the general election, Bernie Sanders was able to harness the power of millions of small contributors to fund his campaign. He was able to spurn large corporate donors in favor of individual contributions. Was this a one-time phenomenon? Can it be repeated in CA-45?"

Schneiderman wasn't a Bernie supporter, and leaned toward Clinton. "I respect their idealism, and they're good for America," he says, "but they're not going to switch and vote Republican because of arguments about realism. I think we're talking about Clinton voters here."

No corporate contributions

While he feels the jury is still out on whether a congressional campaign can exist without large donations from corporations and special interest groups, he has made a commitment not to accept their contributions.

If he were elected he says he'd be the most hated person in Congress, "because I wouldn't follow the Party line. I certainly wouldn't follow Paul Ryan, and I'd speak out against all the President's lies. But if people don't like me, that's OK. My job would be to serve my constituency. I'd be willing to make compromises to help the people in this district, and that's not what we have right now." CCC

By David Bacon