

Scio Twp. teen quits race for trustee

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Young man says older Democrats pressured him to give up

News Staff Reporters

Eighteen-year-old Eric Sturgis said last week he was "a little annoyed and ticked off" that some older Scio Township Democrats pressured him to withdraw from running for trustee after he had filed nominating petitions.

It appears the recently formed Scio Democrats already had their slate of candidates and didn't want to bother with a primary contest, so they urged young Sturgis to withdraw from the race, which he did May 14.

However, Sturgis, a Huron High School student, also said he is OK with what happened.

"I feel very good about my decision," he said. "I have no regrets."

Sturgis said he got started in politics by talking to former neighbor Phares Winney, now deceased, who was supporting a particular candidate in a Democratic city council primary several years ago.

"He got me active in a city council campaign when I was 12," Sturgis said.

Sturgis has started a Young Democrats chapter at Huron High School, interned in former U.S. Rep. Lynn Rivers' office, and worked on campaigns for Ann Arbor Mayor John Hieftje and presidential candidate John Kerry. He said he is working on the campaign of Democrat Philip Zazove for state representative from the 52nd District.

The budding politico got interested in Scio Township issues after he moved from Ann Arbor to Scio Farms mobile home park with his mother and stepfather last year.

"I live in Scio Farms, and I feel that the people in Scio Farms get neglected and their voices aren't heard," he said. Sturgis wants a park for Scio Township, and he also wants to preserve farmland and natural resources, and he supports hunting rights.

Then he found out the township board was all Republicans (though Trustee Charles Ream recently switched parties).

"I said to myself, there's a problem there if the board is all Republicans," Sturgis said.

That was also the feeling of the Scio Democrats, who a year ago announced that they were going to field a slate of Democratic candidates for the first time in many years in Scio Township. However, they hadn't quite counted on Sturgis' participation.

Sturgis said that when he announced May 4 that he was going to run for a Scio Township trustee spot, David Nacht, president of the Scio Democrats, "got kind of upset."

According to Sturgis, the Democrats preferred not to have a contested primary.

When he didn't immediately withdraw, Sturgis said, he started getting calls and e-mails from local Democrats who didn't want him to run. Others told him, "We like you, we think you should run, but it would be better for the Democratic Party if you didn't run," Sturgis said.

Finally, after talking to the other candidates and thinking about it, he relented.

"In ways, I feel like a lot of older people kind of overwhelmed me and strong-armed me," he said. "I ultimately said to myself, 'Do I want to run a primary against these four people?'"

Nacht said he absolutely had not pressured Sturgis to withdraw, but he refused to say what he and Sturgis talked about after Sturgis filed to run.

"I'm not going to talk about things that Eric Sturgis and I talked about confidentially," Nacht said. He also said he didn't know what anyone else might have said to Sturgis, and that he thought the Republicans were "trying to create an issue."

Asked if he wanted to avoid a contested primary, Nacht said, "What I wanted for this ticket, for the candidates who were running, was to

be able to articulate their vision cohesively as an alternative to the Republicans."

Scio Township Supervisor E. Spaulding Clark said Sturgis had been in the Township Hall "multiple days" talking to staff about his desire to run and the pressure on him not to run. Sturgis finally relented after a member of the Scio Democrats slate came to the Township Hall and talked to him, Clark said.

"Here was this 18-year-old kid who just wanted to participate in politics," Clark said. "My entire front office staff was outraged at how he was treated."

The incident has had some fallout for the Democrats. Former Republican Washtenaw County Commissioner Richard DeLong had filed to run for supervisor with the Democrats, but withdrew. DeLong said that he mostly withdrew for personal reasons, but that hearing about Sturgis' dilemma "might have tipped the balance."

"When he was discouraged from running, it bothered me," DeLong said. "Anybody has the right to file."

Regardless, Sturgis still supports the Democratic ticket in Scio Township.

"I support them and will do anything I can to get them elected because I think they're the best choice for Scio Township," Sturgis said.

GOP meet-and-greet

The Washtenaw County Republican Committee invites anyone interested in meeting party candidates for the Aug. 3 primary and Nov. 2 general election to their next Spirit Series from 5:30-7 p.m. Tuesday at the Cottage Inn, 512 E. William St.

The candidates will greet attendants and speak about their upcoming campaigns. Hors d'oeuvres, coffee, tea and soft drinks will be served for a \$10 fee. A cash bar also will be available.

Call (734) 971-4622 to reserve admission or get more information.

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