

Arizona Republican resigns over Tea Party threats

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A local Republican Party official in Arizona resigned his position this week after the attempted assassination of Democratic congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, citing the threat of violence from Tea Party members in his area.

Anthony Miller, who was hailed as a rising star in state Republican circles as one of the party's few black leaders, was reelected last month to a second term as chairman of the Arizona Legislative District 20 of the Republican Party. District 20 is a heavily Republican area in the southwest suburbs of Phoenix, including Ahwatukee Foothills and parts of Chandler and Tempe.

In an e-mail to the state Republican Party chairman, Randy Pullen, sent shortly after the shooting of Giffords, Miller wrote that his wife had asked him "do I think that my PCs [precinct committee members] will shoot at our home? So with this being said I am stepping down."

Miller told the *Arizona Republic* newspaper that local Tea Party members had made verbal and online attacks on him since he first was elected to the local party leadership.

"I wasn't going to resign but decided to quit after what happened Saturday," Miller told the *Republic*. "I love the Republican Party but I don't want to take a bullet for anyone."

Three other members of the local Republican committee, including the secretary, the vice chairman and the former district spokesman, also resigned in sympathy with Miller. The former spokesman, Jeff Kolb, told the newspaper, "The singular focus on 'getting' Anthony" was the reason.

State Senator John McComish, the Republican incumbent in the 20th District, said he had backed Miller's reelection. "It's too bad," he said. "He didn't

deserve to be hounded out of office."

Last month's district election was hotly contested, with a Tea Party slate winning three of the seven leadership positions. Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who has become nationally notorious for his racist attacks on immigrant workers, backed the Tea Party slate and made a personal appeal on behalf of the candidate who unsuccessfully challenged Miller, Thomas Morrissey.

The Arizona Republican Party was split sharply during last year's primary election, with incumbent US Senator John McCain challenged by former congressman and radio talkshow host J. D. Hayworth, who had the backing of the Tea Party and the ultra-right anti-immigrant groups.

Much of the vilification of Miller was due to his ties to McCain. He was a full-time campaign worker for McCain throughout 2010. Miller told the *Republic* he had been called "McCain's boy"—a slur with clear racial overtones—and saw hand gestures threatening gunshots against him in the course of the campaign.

Miller expanded on his reasons for resignation in subsequent press interviews, declaring, "I'm not going to get shot or my family shot for what is a volunteer position." He added, "There's a racial component to it. There's a lot of ugliness."

He described his political opponents as a "radical" Tea Party faction that ran as the "New Vision" slate, which he called "the Sarah Palin type of Republicans."

Meanwhile, a California man was arrested Wednesday for leaving telephone messages threatening liberal Democratic congressman Jim McDermott of Seattle, Washington.

Charles Turner Habermann, 32, of Palm Springs, made two phone calls to McDermott's office denouncing him for opposing tax cuts for the rich.

“He’s a piece of human filth. He’s a liar, he’s a communist,” Habermann said in the first call, last month, continuing with a string of obscenities. He then said he would “blow his brains out” if they ever met. This threat was repeated more explicitly in a second phone call.

After being interviewed by FBI agents, Habermann said he had been drinking and was angry because he regarded the congressman’s position on taxes as a threat to his \$3 million trust fund. He now faces up to ten years in prison.



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