

Missouri Republican candidate, apparent target of anti-Semitic comments, commits suicide

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Missouri's state auditor Tom Schweich died Thursday from a single gunshot to the head in what police are ruling an "apparent suicide." According to a spokesperson for Schweich, he had been preparing to go public with allegations of anti-Semitism against state Republican Party Chairman, John Hancock.

Schweich, a practicing Episcopalian with a Jewish grandfather, had announced his candidacy for the Republican nomination for governor of Missouri in the 2016 elections. Hancock, who is alleged to have made disparaging remarks about Schweich's faith and ethnicity in private discussions, had worked as a consultant for rival Republican gubernatorial candidate, Missouri House Speaker Catherine Hanaway.

"The campaign had been difficult, as all campaigns are," said Schweich's spokesman Spence Jackson. "There were a lot of things that were on his mind." Attempts to identify Schweich as Jewish were seen as potentially damaging to his chances of appealing to the Christian fundamentalists who play an enormous role in Republican primary elections.

Hancock denied the claims, stating that, "I don't have a specific recollection of having said that," while adding that it was "plausible that I would have told somebody that Tom was Jewish, because I thought he was, but I wouldn't have said it in a derogatory or demeaning fashion."

According to Tony Messenger, the editorial page editor for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Schweich had contacted him personally the morning of his death, requesting reporters be sent to his residence for a videotaped interview on the matter. Messenger said in a public letter that Schweich had been experiencing "significant angst" in the days prior to the suicide, and

that "he had heard from campaign donors that while political consultant John Hancock was doing work for gubernatorial candidate Catherine Hanaway, he would mention in passing that Mr. Schweich was Jewish." Messenger stated that Schweich had said he had a number of donors who would go on record to support the allegations.

A series of phone calls on the day of his death suggest that Schweich was undergoing some sort of crisis or breakdown. He called first the AP, then the *Post-Dispatch*, setting up appointments for interviews on the charge of anti-Semitism, but shot himself a few minutes later.

Whatever the circumstances that precipitated the fatal events, Schweich had held a series of responsible, high-stress positions in the federal government, beginning with a 1999 appointment as chief of staff for former US Senator John Danforth, who headed the federal probe into the FBI's actions at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.

He worked as chief of staff to the US ambassador to the United Nations for three years, serving three successive ambassadors—Danforth, then Anne Patterson, then John Bolton. He was also principal deputy secretary of state in the administration of President George W. Bush, responsible for international law enforcement, with a particular focus on illegal drug trafficking in Afghanistan under the US occupation.

That such an individual could be driven to suicide—if indeed that is what happened—speaks volumes about the toxic political environment in the American political establishment, and particularly in the fever swamps of the Republican Party's right-wing.



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