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### **GOP nominee endorses Democrat after stepping aside under pressure from right**

By Tony Romm - 11/01/09 02:28 PM ET

The Republican in a New York House race that has become a symbol of the divisions within the GOP endorsed her former Democratic rival Sunday, a sharp snub to the third-party conservative who forced her out of the race.

Dede Scozzafava, who'd been chosen by local Republican leaders to try to hold the seat for the GOP, instead threw her support behind Democrat Bill Owens -- only a day after she unexpectedly [backed out](#) of the tough, three-way special election.

Ultimately, her decision not to back Conservative Party candidate Doug Hoffman in the contest to fill former Rep. John McHugh's open seat is likely to enrage party leaders, who rallied around Hoffman almost immediately after Scozzafava announced her campaign suspension.

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"You know me, and throughout my career, I have been always been an independent voice for the people I represent. I have stood for our honest principles, and a truthful discussion of the issues, even when it cost me personally and politically," she said in a statement released Sunday afternoon.

"It is in this spirit that I am writing to let you know I am supporting Bill Owens for Congress and urge you to do the same," Scozzafava added. "It's not in the cards for me to be your representative, but I strongly believe Bill is the only candidate who can build upon John McHugh's lasting legacy in the U.S. Congress."

Scozzafava's late nod to Owens could spell trouble for Hoffman, who [is statistically deadlocked](#) with his Democratic opponent in recent polls. The New York assemblywoman is considerably more moderate than Hoffman -- and presumably, some of her supporters are too -- so the possibility that many of her prospective voters could gravitate toward Owens on Tuesday is not totally unfathomable.

Nevertheless, Scozzafava's decision on Sunday is bound to infuriate Republicans, many of whom announced within hours of her suspension that they backed Hoffman and hoped soon to welcome him into their caucus. The Republican National Committee, the National Republican Congressional Committee and a host of party leaders urged their members to do the same, in part to defeat the growing meme that Republicans were warring among themselves about the NY-23 race.

Scozzafava, however, stressed on Sunday that her endorsement was about her district's well being, not her party's appearance. She urged supporters to head to the polls on Tuesday to support Owens because he, more than Hoffman, could best represent Watertown's interests.

"In Bill Owens, I see a sense of duty and integrity that will guide him beyond political partisanship. He will be an independent voice devoted to doing what is right for New York," she said. "Bill understands this district and its people, and when he represents us in Congress he will put our interests first."

After learning of the endorsement, Owens thanked Scozzafava and praised her for her work in public service.

"I am honored to have Assemblywoman Scozzafava's endorsement. Over the course of her career, Dede has always committed to serving the people of Upstate New York before serving a partisan agenda," Owens said. "I have a tremendous amount of respect for what she's accomplished. We share a commitment to finding common sense solutions to address the challenges we're facing here in Upstate New York."

Source:

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