



CAROL BAKER

POLITICAL NOTEBOOK

## Republicans set sights on a sweep

With three open South Bay legislative seats sending visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads, Republican party activists are trying to put on a unified front aimed at a general-election sweep in November.

How sweet it would be if... especially since two of the coastal seats have for so long cushioned the derrieres of Democrats in what are Republican-leaning districts.

But Rep. Jane Harman's fateful decision to seek the governorship and the term limits that have nudged Assemblywoman Debra Bowen to pursue a local state Senate seat give the GOP its best chance in years to establish a beachhead in the South Bay.

The other seat in the 54th Assembly District belongs to outgoing Republican Steve Kuykendall, who is relinquishing his Palos Verdes Peninsula-based post for a crack at Harman's.

Because midterm elections tend to favor the party outside the White House — and given a variety of other rational reasons and half-baked theories floating about on why Republicans should do well this year — you'd think a little cockiness might set in.

### They know better

Not so. Republicans know better. They've lost plenty of elections here before.

The reasons why are multifold, but most can be tied directly to the independent-mindedness of coastal-area voters.

These electoral oddballs support Republican pro-business ideals but tend to fight any visible manifestation of economic growth in their own back yards. As one activist put it: "They're wealthy people who like where they live and want nothing to change their lifestyle; they like keeping it exclusive."

Hence the push for pulling together as a united force. The conservative Lincoln Club held a "unity lunch" in Torrance less than two weeks after the June 2 primary, scheduling it far in advance to get up-front commitments from candidates — eventual losers and winners — to attend.

The goal was to bury all the bitterness from the intramural fights for the party's nomination by getting all the candidates to kiss-and-make-up and, of course, endorse the nominee in each race.

Republican division has come into play in several past races, most notably in three-time congressional candidate Susan Brooks' attempt to unseat Harman from her Venice-to-San Pedro 36th District seat.

The tenacious Brooks' controversial campaign antics inadvertently spawned a "Republicans for Harman" group that made a point of being visible in both general election campaigns.

This time around, Brooks lost to Kuykendall in the primary. At the unity lunch, she didn't hesitate to point out to a gathering that included at least one former "Republican for Harman" the damage she'd suffered at the hands of GOP brethren who betrayed her.

### Choosing sides

"You have to choose a side in life; I choose the Republican side," Brooks said. "I'm going to support Steve in the areas (of the congressional district) I'm strongest in."

(Not one to miss an opportunity, Brooks also squeezed in a solicitation for contributions to retire a \$12,000 debt from her latest campaign before she took her seat again at the luncheon.)

By endorsing Kuykendall, Brooks certainly banked some credit with party activists. She wasn't going to slight him the way she'd been slighted.

She's certainly not the only former South Bay nominee to take a beating from prominent Republicans.

In the 53rd Assembly District race in 1996, Republican hopeful John Morris denied his victorious opponent, Torrance City Councilman Dan Walker, his support in the general election campaign. Four years earlier, Walker withdrew his endorsement of nominee Brad Parton, the former Redondo Beach mayor, after Parton mailed a controversial hit piece comparing Bowen to a Nazi.

Those may not seem like things that could sink a candidate. Other things contributed to the losses Parton and Walker both suffered to Democrat Bowen. But when Republicans begin devouring their own, they don't leave

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much leftovers to vote into office.

Rolling Hills resident Shawn Steel, for one, is sick of seeing the GOP divide and get conquered.

This time around, Steel, treasurer of the California Republican Party, foresees coordinated campaigns between the Assembly and congressional candidates whose would-be districts either overlap or adjoin each other. "There may be stuff on TV, and absentee ballot campaigns," Steel said.

Manhattan Beach resident Bill Eggers, a libertarian think tank scholar, is running for the 53rd District seat. The GOP candidate in the 54th Assembly District is Long Beach prosecutor Julie Alban.

Naturally, all local Republican candidates will want to latch on to party standard bearer Dan Lungren's gubernatorial campaign, especially if he's doing well. Lungren could be the sugar-

plum fairy in this cast of candidates.

"So much is dependent on the top of the ticket," Steel said. "If Dan's running a good campaign, it's going to be good news for our other candidates down on the ticket. I don't see a lot of ticket splitting."

But don't figure Steel thinks a three-seat Republican win is a lock. "I'm a lousy predictor," he said.

All he knows is that party activists managed to get the South Bay's primary rivals to endorse each other.

And some of them even sat down for a hot meal together after the primary battle.

That's a start. And that's more unity than coastal Republicans have seen in a long time.

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