



[Comments](#) | [Recommended](#)

Dallas Rep. Carol Kent, opponent Stefani Carter trade blows on ethics, intimidation

2:38 PM CT

02:42 PM CDT on Wednesday, September 1, 2010

BY GROMER JEFFERS Jr. / The Dallas Morning News

A misleading charge that state Rep. Carol Kent improperly took state housing reimbursements has created friction between the incumbent Democrat and her Republican challenger, Dallas lawyer Stefani Carter.

The bickering between the camps has drifted into the bizarre, with Carter making extraordinary claims that her campaign staff twice called 911 when they feared leaving the office because of the “suspect vehicles” parked near their cars.

Carter’s claim followed an allegation by Kent that an “individual” followed her as she drove through the district on personal errands and harassed her while she greeted voters at their homes.

“He hid his features behind dark glasses and a hat, would not identify himself when asked, and then ran away as soon as he saw someone pull out their cell phone camera,” Kent wrote to Carter.

The race for District 102 is one of the most watched House contests in the state.

Kent won the district, which includes parts of North Dallas and Garland, in 2008, one of several area pick-ups by Democrats. But it remains a swing district with a heavy number of Republicans.

The candidates do not routinely engage each other, but did last week after Carter issued a news release accusing Kent of improperly accepting tax dollars and campaign funds for the same expenses.

“Double-dipping is wrong,” Carter said in the release. “If the state is giving you money to cover your expenses in Austin, you should have the integrity not to have your campaign pay the expenses, too. Pocketing the money is stealing from taxpayers.”

Carter based her charges on work by California ethics watchdog David Palmer.

But Republican and Democratic leaders in the House agree that it’s common – and legal – for lawmakers to use campaign contributions to defray costs associated with serving in the Legislature. Caucus leaders wrote recently that the per diem offered by the state is not sufficient to cover all out-of-pocket expenses “incurred because of one’s public service.”

They noted long legal precedent allowing the practice and the famous case of a representative who successfully applied for food stamps in the 1970s. Legislators are paid just \$7,200 a year, and the additional per diem is designed to cover their costs while the Legislature is in session.

Kent sent an open letter to Carter expressing her dismay that Carter made false claims about her personal ethics.

“I urge you to end your campaign’s false, negative attacks today,” Kent wrote.

Carter refused to answer questions Wednesday about whether she made false claims about Kent. She instead provided the response she sent to Kent.

“It comes with great surprise and disappointment that I receive a letter from you defending the practice of double-dipping and asserting that my campaign has been negative,” she wrote.

She asked how Kent could justify taxpayer funded reimbursements while also receive campaign reimbursements for the same expenditures.

But Kent did not receive taxpayer reimbursements for her expenses. Like other lawmakers, she got the per diem, and she covered the rest of her costs through campaign funds.

Kent’s letter to Carter also admonishes the Republican for sending hooligans to disrupt campaigning.

“Your negative campaign tactics directly encourage this type of goon-squad behavior,” Kent wrote.

Carter’s letter referred to stalking and that she wanted to campaign without the “specter of intimidation.”

“It is these kinds of campaign shenanigans, personal attacks and dirty politics of which people are sick and tired going into November,” Carter wrote.