



Konnyu: He blames media "half-truths and distortions."

Konnyu Untangle This Mess

Momentum builds to oust congressman

Stung by last week's front-page report in the *San Jose Mercury News* that portrayed him as a sexual harasser, freshman Republican Congressman Ernest Konnyu this week faces the biggest crisis in his political career. With opposition to him mounting in his own party, the former state assembly member from Saratoga reacted the way public servants facing crises

often react: he went on vacation.

Before departing, Konnyu released a statement blasting the recent *Merc* story that alleged he had made comments about the size of a female employee's breasts and had ordered another to "stand up and turn around" during a job interview so he could get a "better look."

In response, Konnyu says he is "extremely disappointed in the former employees who helped the *Mercury* create an unfair story based on half-truths and distortions." Characterizing

the story as an "unfair and unjustified attack by the *Mercury News*," Konnyu vows that his "priority is representing the 12th District" and that "disgruntled former employees" will not keep him from pursuing his goals.

Despite assertions that the ordeal will not hamper his ability to represent the 12th District, the brewing scandal—already dubbed "Boobiegat" by some veteran observers—appears to have thrown the usually agile and always controversial Konnyu off stride. Konnyu's

decision to take a breather at this time was apparently a sudden one. According to a member of his staff, Konnyu had no vacation or travel plans, is in the district this week and is enjoying some "personal time off" away from telephones and news reporters.

Key local Republicans, meanwhile, say they are looking closely at the situation in the 12th District, a bastion of Republicanism on the otherwise Democratic San Francisco Peninsula. "These are certainly not the qualities that we look for [in a congressman]," says Laddie Hughes, a Palo Alto GOP activist who ran against Konnyu in last year's primary election and finished third. Hughes, who was recently appointed to the State Teacher Credential Commission by Governor George Deukmejian, remains active in the Washington, DC-based National Women's Political Caucus Campaign Fund.

Expressing her "disappointment" at the recent disclosures, Hughes says, "Mr. Konnyu will have to answer quite a few questions" on this subject. Until then, adds Hughes, "one newspaper article does not a candidate make," although she will "certainly be watching," to decide whether to enter the primary election next year.

If Hughes challenges Konnyu for the GOP congressional nod, she may not be alone. Former Congressman Pete McCloskey confirmed this week that he may also enter the race. In addition, Palo Alto's former Mayor, real estate baron Scott Carey, has reportedly been seeking support for a run against Konnyu.

Adding to Konnyu's woes, former Rep. Ed Zschau told *Metro* this week that he is among those currently "looking around" for a candidate to oppose Konnyu next year. Refusing to comment on the Boobiegat story because he has not discussed the matter with Konnyu yet, Zschau nonetheless expressed displeasure at other Konnyu actions.

"I have to say that I have been disappointed with Ernie's willingness to get around and meet with people in the district," Zschau says. Recalling that he conducted 100 constituent meetings in his first year in office, Zschau says, "I haven't seen him do that."

"This district has a tradition of people in Congress conducting frequent town meetings and providing leadership

on controversial and important issues," Zschau says, noting that local constituents have "grown to expect that kind of representation. If they don't get it [from Konnyu], I suspect that they will begin to look around for someone else."

While seeking "capable and able" people to consider running for Congress, Zschau flatly rules out running again for his old job. Asked what he would do if leaders of his party came to him and pleaded with him to run, Zschau joked that he'd "come up with a creative idea to get someone else to run. . . . There are lots of good people in this district who would do an outstanding job in Congress."

Zschau says he has always encouraged good people to run for Congress, even when he was the incumbent. However, this time out Zschau admits he is prepared to endorse a challenger to the incumbent Republican officeholder. "I want to see all of the candidates that come forward," Zschau says, adding that it is "possible" that he will endorse one of Konnyu's opponents.

Konnyu's main opponent may very well be former Congressman McCloskey, who this week told *Metro* that he is seriously considering entering the race. McCloskey says he was "appalled" by a recent attack Konnyu made on the floor of the Congress against Republican congressional leader Silvio Conte whom, McCloskey reports, Konnyu publicly accused of "selling the president's budget down the river."

McCloskey says that numerous "disturbing" reports he has received from former colleagues in the House have convinced him that "a lot of people are concerned that the Republican congressman from this district is an embarrassment." By attacking Conte on the House floor, McCloskey says Konnyu may have "burned bridges with a personal attack on leaders of his own party" and thus crippled his ability to reach accommodations with those leaders for the benefit of his constituents.

"I certainly have been embarrassed by Ernie's performance," McCloskey says, noting that Konnyu's conduct does not measure up to the performance of predecessor Zschau.

McCloskey points out that he tried to convince other Republicans to run against Konnyu last year. McCloskey's preferred candidates for his old seat in 1986's election included Sunnyvale Mayor Brian O'Toole, businessman Peter Giles and *Palo Alto Weekly* publisher Bill Johnson, all of whom declined to enter the race.

McCloskey says he is dreading having to make the run-or-not-run decision. "I have been asked by a lot of people to run," McCloskey says, but insists he is enjoying his new life as a "small town lawyer."

"I have spent nearly five years learning how to be a lawyer again, I'm actively working to help George Bush and Howard Baker and I'll be 60 years old in September," McCloskey says wearily. "I don't really want to have to face making this decision for some time."

McCloskey says he expects to make a decision about the race in "roughly five or six months" and that he will "absolutely" consider endorsing a Konnyu opponent—perhaps even a Democrat—should he decide against mounting a campaign of his own.



Zschau: Disappointed with Konnyu

—Hal Plotkin