

Ousted Haywood Republicans face party disloyalty charges



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Five Haywood conservatives labeled as trouble-makers by the GOP establishment are facing charges of party disloyalty.

Disloyalty charges are a final check mate in the ongoing tug-of-war for control of the Haywood County Republican Party, which has been stereotypically characterized as the mainstream branch of the party versus a dogmatic activist faction. Those facing charges include Jeremy

Davis, Richard West, Monroe Miller, Paul Yeager and Eddie Cabe — all of whom were overthrown from leadership roles in the local party earlier this year.

A hearing on the disloyalty charges will be held by the N.C. GOP executive committee in Raleigh this Saturday, with a decision expected that day. Party disloyalty charges are incredibly rare.

“We regret any action like this being taken. It is not something that we like, and it is not something that normally occurs. But occasionally from time to time arise certain situations where actions must be looked at,” said Aubrey Woodard, the regional GOP party chair for 11th Congressional district.

The charges allege that the so-called Haywood Five advocated against Republicans on the ballot in the 2016 general election. If the charges stand, they would be barred from holding office or leadership positions within the party for up to five years.

To supporters, the so-called Haywood Five are unwavering ideologues upholding true conservative values — rejecting Republican candidates or party leaders who don’t meet their conservative purity test.

“When you cut through all the crap, our crime was that we were expecting conservatives to be conservative. That’s really what they’ve got us on,” said Jeremy Davis, one of the Haywood Five. “We wanted Republicans to vote in accordance with the Republican platform, and they are trying to throw us out of the party for it. That’s hypocritical in my opinion.”

But to critics, the Haywood Five are rabble-rousers who use name-calling, ridiculing and public embarrassment as a political weapon against Republicans who aren’t on their side. The behavior has run the gamut from lewd and suggestive videos circulated online, cyber harassment and even physical intimidation.

The Haywood Five have already been ousted from leadership roles during a take-back of the party by mainstream Republicans earlier this year.

The dogmatic faction had infiltrated the party’s core over the past four years, but mainstream Republicans pulled off a surprise coup at the party’s annual convention back in February and voted out more than a dozen members of the activist faction from their precinct chair positions.

Davis believes the disloyalty charges are aimed at preventing them from coming back and regaining control of the party again since they would be prepared for a showdown over precinct chairs the next time around.

“That’s a one-trick pony,” Davis said of the coop.

Indeed, keeping the Haywood Five out of party leadership roles would be the main consequence if the charges stick.

“They could not reclaim positions they had in the party for up to five years,” explained Dallas Woodhouse, executive director of the N.C. GOP.

Following their ouster, the dogmatic faction started a new political action committee called the Haywood Republican Alliance. While Davis plans to fight the disloyalty charges, he said he doesn’t particularly care if he gets banned from roles within the party.

“I’ll be perfectly honest with you. If the power structure stays the way it is now, I have no wish or desire to go back into the Republican Party. I am more effective right here,” Davis said, sitting in the headquarters of his Haywood Republican Alliance last week.

West agrees.

“We are winning the battle anyway,” said West, citing the activities of the new Haywood Republican Alliance.

Yeager believes the party establishment feels threatened by the Alliance.

“I think that the Haywood County GOP leadership was surprised when we failed to just give up on political activism after they electioneered several of us off the HCGOP executive committee,” Yeager said. “They appear to have made interfering with us a major goal since then.”

One of the faction’s ring-leaders, Monroe Miller, managed to survive the coup earlier this year and hang on to his seat as a precinct chair. He was subsequently ousted anyway for allegedly trying to wreck the party from the inside by undermining the credibility of its leadership.

“Miller frequently publishes articles on his blog in which he demeans, ridicules, and attempt to embarrass the leadership of the Haywood County Republican Party,” according to a resolution calling for Miller’s removal. “Miller frequently sends copious emails to large groups in which he attempts to make the HCGOP leadership look incapable, inefficient or even dishonest.”

Grounds for disloyalty charges?

It is unknown at this point exactly what hard evidence will be presented against the Haywood Five for allegedly supporting candidates other than Republicans in the 2016 general election.

“This should be considered a trial-like situation. So I can’t speak to any of the evidence of that nature,” Woodard said. “They will be extended every opportunity to present the rebuttal or defense as it may be. We will make sure everything is done correctly and honestly and above board.”

Simply being trouble makers isn't official grounds for party disloyalty. But directly advocating against Republican candidates is a no-no for anyone in a party leadership position, per GOP party rules.

"It is alleged that you participated in efforts to support candidates other than Republicans during the 2016 election," reads a letter from the state party to the Haywood Five in early October informing them of the disloyalty hearing.

But Davis said the Haywood Five hasn't received any hard evidence to that effect.

"I have asked and asked 'Can you tell me what evidence you have against me so I can prepare a defense,'" Davis said. "As I can attest I haven't done these things it must be falsified or fabricated."

Inside the disloyalty hearing

Only two of the Haywood Five — Davis and Yeager — plan to go to the hearing to present a defense in person. The rest of the Haywood Five believe it is fruitless to attend.

"It wouldn't make a difference. The deal is cooked," said West.

Although Yeager is going, he agreed it might not do any good, saying the Haywood GOP leaders have "apparently found sympathetic ears with no desire to hear more than one side of the story."

Ironically, three of the Haywood Five have been issued trespass warnings from the N.C. GOP banning them from GOP functions and property — namely Davis, Yeager and Eddie Cabe. But the trespass ban will be waived for the hearing.

"If you have received a letter of Trespass, you are permitted to attend the meeting during the portion discussing the charges," states a letter from the state party to the Haywood Five members.

The hearing will be held during the regular business meeting of the N.C. GOP statewide executive committee, comprised of more than 500 members from local GOP chapters all over the state. Only between 250 and 350 will likely attend the state business meeting this weekend.

For the charges to stick, they must be approved by a two-thirds vote of those present.

It's unclear how the issue will be received by the executive committee. On the surface, it could appear to be a spat best settled at the local level. But it is also a precedent-setting test for how the party will handle the widening gap between far-right extremists and moderates.

How we got here

The disloyalty charges were initiated in May by the Haywood GOP executive committee, comprised of 30 precinct chairs and at-large officers. This is the same body that the Haywood Five and their compatriots had been ousted from just three months prior.

The Haywood resolution was then sent up the chain to the 17-county GOP regional body, which mirrors the 11th Congressional District.

Woodard polled the 11th district executive committee by mail, asking them to endorse the idea of sending the charges on to the state party.

“Many of you know the long standing issues the NCGOP has had with the now former leadership of the Haywood County Republican Party,” Woodard wrote. “It is important that the district be supportive of our county organizations. Please help us address this serious issue by signing the enclosed petition.”

A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included.

“The responses were overwhelming as far as the individuals taking the time and energy to respond,” Woodard said.

After receiving the resolution from the Haywood GOP and the petition from the 11th District GOP, the state GOP was obligated under procedures in the Party Plan of Organization to address the allegations.

“Either one of those two actions would put this matter in front of the state executive committee, who is really the only one that can determine issues of party disloyalty,” Woodhouse explained. “At the end of the day, it would be up to members of the executive committee where they go and what decisions they make and whether they make a finding.”

Each of the five members facing accusations of party disloyalty will be voted on separately.