Ark. GOP calls candidates' statements 'offensive'

Contributed by CHUCK BARTELS
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LITTLE ROCK, Ark.
(AP) _ Arkansas Republicans tried to distance themselves Saturday from a Republican state representative's assertion that slavery was a ``blessing in disguise'' and a Republican state House candidate who advocates deporting all Muslims.

The claims were made in books written, respectively, by Rep. Jon Hubbard of Jonesboro and House candidate Charlie Fuqua of Batesville.

Those books received attention on Internet news sites Friday.

On Saturday, state GOP Chairman Doyle Webb called the books ``highly offensive.'' And U.S. Rep. Rick Crawford, a Republican who represents northeast Arkansas, called the writings ``divisive and racially inflammatory.''

Hubbard wrote in his 2009 self-published book, ``Letters To The Editor: Confessions Of A Frustrated Conservative,'' that ``the institution of slavery that the black race has long believed to be an abomination upon its people may actually have been a blessing in disguise.'' He also wrote that African-Americans were better off than they would have been had they not been captured and shipped to the United States.

Fuqua, who served in the Arkansas House from 1996 to 1998, wrote there is ``no solution to the Muslim problem short of expelling all followers of the religion from the United States,'' in his 2012 book, titled ``God's Law.''

Fuqua said Saturday that he hadn't realized he'd become a target within his own party, which he said surprised him.

``I think my views are fairly well-accepted by most people,'' Fuqua said before hanging up, saying he was busy knocking on voters' doors. The attorney is running against incumbent Democratic Rep. James McLean in House District 63.

Hubbard, a marketing representative, didn't return voicemail messages seeking comment Saturday. He is running against Democrat Harold Copenhaver in House District 58.

The November elections could be a crucial turning point in Arkansas politics. Democrats hold narrow majorities in both chambers, but the GOP has been working hard to swing the Legislature its way for the first time since the end of the Civil War, buoyed by picking up three congressional seats in 2010. Their efforts have also been backed by an influx of money from national conservative groups.

Rep. Crawford said Saturday he was ``disappointed and disturbed.''

``The statements that have been reported portray attitudes and beliefs that would return our state and country to a harmful and regrettable past,'' Crawford said.

U.S. Rep. Tim Griffin, R-Ark., kicked off the GOP's response Saturday by issuing a release, saying the ``statements of Hubbard and Fuqua are ridiculous, outrageous and have no place in the civil discourse of either party.''

``Had I known of these statements, I would not have contributed to their campaigns. I am requesting that they give my contributions to charity,'' said Griffin, who donated $100 to each candidate.

The Arkansas Republican House Caucus followed, saying the views of Hubbard and Fuqua ``are in no way reflective of, or endorsed by, the Republican caucus. The constituencies they are seeking to represent will ultimately judge these statements at the ballot box.''

Then Webb, who has spearheaded the party's attempt to control the Legislature, said the writings ``were highly offensive to many Americans and do not reflect the viewpoints of the Republican Party of Arkansas. While we respect their right to freedom of expression and thought, we strongly disagree with those ideas.''

Webb, though, accused state Democrats of using the issue as a distraction.

Democrats themselves have been largely silent, aside from the state party's tweet and Facebook post calling attention to the writings. A Democratic Party spokesman didn't immediately return a call for comment Saturday.

The two candidates share other political and religious views on their campaign websites.

Hubbard, who sponsored a failed bill in 2011 that would have severely restricted immigration, wrote on his website that the issue is still among his priorities, as is doing ``whatever I can to defend, protect and preserve our Christian heritage.''

Fuqua blogs on his website. One post is titled, ``Christianity in Retreat,'' and says ``there is a strange alliance between the liberal left and the Muslim religion.''

``Both are antichrist in that they both deny that Jesus is God in the flesh of man, and the savior of mankind. They both also hold that their cause should take over the entire world through violent, bloody, revolution,'' the post says.

In a separate passage, Fuqua wrote ``we now have a president that has a well documented history with both the Muslim religion and Communism.''