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Party leaders challenge claim that candidates are 'walking into' seats

By Michael Petro
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A candidate for the Town of Boston council and both the Republican and Democratic party chairs in the town are rebuffing claims by a current and former board member that the endorsement process was not up to snuff.

Mike Cartechine, who's running unopposed for town council, said comments made by Town Board member Jeffrey Genzel about there being a lack of choices for this year's election in Boston and that "corrupt party bosses took people's right to vote away" could not be further from the truth.

Genzel, as well as fellow board member Jay Boardway and supervisor Martin Ballowe, will not be running for re-election after two terms each. None of the three sought endorsements from either major party, but it's been Genzel who's taken exception to the process. The town's election is Tuesday.

"Continuing to put forth the notion that 'party bosses took people's right to vote away,' is completely untrue and disingenuous," Cartechine said. "It is also insulting to the volunteer committee members who interview candidates and circle petitions, as well as to the candidates seeking office."



File photo

Boston Town Hall will welcome at least two new board members after Tuesday's election.

During a board meeting last month, Genzel said there is no election and that candidates on this year's ballot are "walking into positions." He blamed what he called "corrupt party leaders." He added party leaders tried to force him and other board members to put people of

their choice in town positions, and now he is paying because he did not comply.

Carl Simmeth, chairman of the town's Republican committee, responded this week to

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Vara running a write-in campaign for Boston supervisor

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the criticism by saying, "I find it startling that he would make such unfounded statements

dorsing Vara again because as councilman he missed board meetings when important issues were being discussed due to coaching obligations. He added Vara also does not

of politics. He said most felt that not endorsing Genzel, Boardway and Ballowe would be a step in that direction. However, he added he would have given all of them an

sitting at the board level when you're supposed to be conducting town business. It's not a political arena up there."

He said Genzel never came to town Republicans looking for an endorsement. The committee had endorsed Genzel twice before.

"I have no idea what he is talking about. I kind of try to stay out of that," he said. "My job as chairman is to get people elected to the board to serve the residents. After that, at the end of the day, the (elected officials) have got the hammer and make the calls."

Cartechine and Jennifer Lucachik were cross-endorsed by town Democrats for council seats and the same was done for Jason Keding, a current councilman, who's running unopposed for supervisor.

Rich Hawkins, the chair of the town's Democratic committee, said there has been a "really big problem" in Boston for the last eight years with "having people in power that didn't care what happens to the community."

He added, "I think they were looking at their own agendas first."

He cited the board trying to do away with the fire contracts, which he said "put the whole town in jeopardy" and spending over budget as a few of the major issues.

Only Lucachik will appear on the Democratic ballot, but Hawkins said that's only because paperwork was not filled out and filed on time by Cartechine and Keding.

Gary Vara, a former member of the board who is running a write-in campaign for supervisor, also has been critical of the process to endorse candidates. At that same meeting last month, he called certain endorsed candidates "hand-picked" by the party leaders. Vara unsuccessfully ran for re-election two years ago after serving on the board for one term.

He echoed Genzel's sentiments in saying that all of the political leaders want control over how the candidates will vote. However, he said his allegiance is to the residents.

"When I found out that when people go to vote there are no choices for any race and that (candidates are being) handpicked by the political leaders who have set this election up, I can't stand for something like that," Vara said. "I wanted to give people a choice; there's supposed to be a democracy in this town."

Hawkins said Democrats have given Vara endorsements twice. However, he said, the committee decided against en-

attend Democrat functions throughout the year.

"If I'm going to endorse somebody, I'm going to endorse somebody with the same values and same beliefs," he said.

Vara lauded his experience with school, town and athletic budgets, and in negotiating contracts and finding solutions to difficult situations. He said he was able to accomplish positive things for the town during his four years despite being in the minority as a Democratic councilman on the board.

He added he's concerned that Keding has proposed making the supervisor position full-time, which would cost more than \$50,000 and the cost of fringe benefits that come with it.

Keding said at the September Town Board meeting that he did ask Ballowe to consider making the position full-time in the proposed 2018 budget because having someone in a full-time role would help move forward a town that has experienced financial troubles.

"I feel like I can better serve the taxpayers being here full-time instead of part-time," Keding said.

Cartechine is worried that misguided comments being thrown out there could cause a misconception about the endorsement process.

He and the two party chairs explained that the 12-member party committees – two from each of the town's six districts – interview any candidate who expresses interest in running. The committee votes on who to endorse and then circulates petitions to get that person on the ballot. About 115 signatures are needed for the petition to qualify, according to Simmeth.

"The endorsements were certainly not 'given' to hand-picked candidates, as some would like people to believe," Cartechine said.

He added, "These (so-called) 'corrupt party bosses' are your neighbors and friends, who are interested, involved and active within a political party. Anyone registered is welcome to join their own party's committee. None of the committee members are paid or hold influence in the actual governance of our town. Their power is their ability to endorse a candidate for their party line on the ballot, which helps garner votes by members of the party."

Hawkins admitted that the town's parties have been working together for the first time in four to five decades and agreed they wanted what is best for the town regardless

opportunity to interview for an endorsement.

"People know that if they ask me for an endorsement, I will interview them, but it doesn't mean I'm going to endorse them," he said. "I'd give them the opportunity because I don't want anyone saying, 'Rich never gave me

the opportunity. He didn't care and he wouldn't even listen to what I have to say.'"

Simmeth said he didn't turn anyone away for an interview. There simply wasn't a big field of candidates. Republicans also endorsed unopposed candidates Sandra Quinlan for town clerk and incumbent justice Debra Bender. Acting town clerk Dawn Boncal is running a write-in campaign to try to retain her position.

"Politics is a tough game,

and there are not many people who want to get involved," Simmeth said. "There's a lot of work that they have to do."

Though the five candidates in this year's town election are running unopposed, the results are not written in stone, according to Simmeth. He said candidates are actively campaigning, going door-to-door and putting up signage.

He added that residents want to meet the people who are running and then expect that elected officials are will-

ing to discuss issues with them when they arise.

"Even though there is not a candidate on a major opposition party line, there are a couple of write-ins, and you never know what can happen in this game," he said. "The Republicans are out there working hard, knocking on doors and treating this like a regular campaign."