



Meadows quietly switches to GOP

February 21, 2008

By Ed Offley

News Herald Writer 747-5079 / oeffley@pcnh.com

State Attorney Steve Meadows confirmed Wednesday he has changed his political party affiliation from Democrat to Republican in anticipation of a tough re-election campaign.

Meadows said he changed his party affiliation in a quiet visit to the Bay County Supervisor of Elections Office on Tuesday. Neither his campaign nor the 14th Judicial Circuit State Attorney's office made any announcement of the shift, and Meadows himself only conceded the change when contacted by The News Herald on Wednesday afternoon.

"I was trying to do this with little fanfare," Meadows said. "I did this because my personal philosophy is that of a conservative, and I most closely identify myself with Republican candidates like (former Florida House Speaker) Allan Bense rather than Democratic candidates like (2004 presidential candidate) Howard Dean."

Meadows declined to elaborate on how a change in party affiliation might play into his 2008 re-election tactics. As of Wednesday evening, Meadows did not have a declared opponent, although there has been widespread speculation that 14th Circuit Court Judge **Glenn Hess** is preparing to run against him as a Democrat. **Hess**, who has announced his resignation from the bench effective March 1, declined to comment when contacted Wednesday.

"I do expect a lively campaign in which the records of both candidates will be explored in depth," Meadows said.

One obvious implication from Meadows' change in parties is that it reduces the likelihood he and **Hess** would be locked in a Democratic primary contest that would culminate in the primary election scheduled for Aug. 26. With each man running as a different party nominee, the state attorney race would run until the 2008 general election on Nov. 4.

In 2004, Meadows campaigned as a Democrat and won the 14th Judicial Circuit State Attorney job in a close contest with Republican nominee Martha "Sister" Blackmon Milligan. Meadows received 62,703 votes to Milligan's 59,132.

One wrinkle from Meadows' party shift is a requirement in Florida's election laws pertaining to candidates who change political parties during an election campaign. Bay County Supervisor of Elections Mark Andersen said Wednesday that under current election laws, a candidate may change party affiliation, but only if there is more than six months to go before the general election.

However, the law adds, "Within 15 days after filing the change (in party affiliation) with the filing officer, the candidate must send a written notice to all contributors. The candidate must offer (in the notice) to return to the contributor on a pro rata basis all contributions given in support of the original office." The "pro rata" amount is determined by a formula based on dividing the total amount of unobligated campaign contributions on hand by the total number of contributors, then multiplying the result by the amount provided by the individual contributor.

On Oct. 29, 2007, Meadows reported he had \$114,000 in his campaign chest, including \$89,000 from 209 individual and corporate donors and \$25,000 as a personal loan. Of those contributing, 157 gave the maximum allowed contribution of \$500.