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PAC's Mailing Linking Gregg and Meadows Raises Eyebrows ^[1]

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By:

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Above: The PAC's latest mailer (left), Steve Japinga (center), and the PAC's 2015 attack ad on Erik Altmann.

A political mailer sent out by the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee (PAC) is raising eyebrows among some East Lansing residents who remember what happened four years ago.

The mailer promotes the City Council campaigns of two candidates, headlining, "Jessy Gregg and Mark Meadows care deeply about the future of East Lansing."

There are six candidates running for three seats ^[2] on City Council. Meadows and Erik Altmann are running for reelection and there are three additional challengers: Lisa Babcock, John Revitte, and Warren Stanfield.

So far, the Chamber has endorsed only Meadows and Gregg, both of whom accepted the endorsement [3].

Based on mail received by ELi, the Chamber's ad is raising two specific questions: Why would Meadows and Gregg accept the Chamber's endorsement, given what happened four years ago? And is challenger Jessy Gregg really running with incumbent Mark Meadows?

Chamber PAC's actions four years ago cast a long shadow

Asked for comment on the mailer (reproduced here [4]), Gregg told ELi by email on Friday, "Considering the troubled history of the Chamber's involvement in East Lansing City elections I did have to do some soul searching before accepting the Chamber's endorsement."

She wrote, "The Chamber [vice] president Steve Japinga assured me that he regretted the negative tactics that had been used in the past and that during this election cycle the Chamber planned only positive endorsements and no attacks."

Gregg is referring to what happened four years ago when the Chamber's PAC issued attack mailings [5] against then-candidate Erik Altmann. The group claimed that Altmann would prolong blight and suggested "he is backed by shadowy dark-money groups that have repeatedly broken campaign finance laws and pledged to obstruct progress in East Lansing at any cost."

In response, Altmann promised [6] in 2015 to bring "an end to needless tax giveaways to big business." He and Meadows were elected.

During that election, Meadows had been endorsed by the Chamber's PAC. Asked for comment in 2015 on the attack mailers, Meadows told ELi [7] he believed the negative ad campaign against Altmann by "a powerful and well-funded organization" to be unprecedented in an East Lansing Council race.

In 2015, Meadows called the Chamber's attack "cowardly" and "likely funded by developers and landlords." He called their approach "risky, reckless, amateurish and ill-advised," saying it amounted to "dark money" and the use of corporate funds in campaigns.

Said Meadows in 2015, "I cannot imagine why any candidate would ever participate in their endorsement process again."

Once elected, Meadows and Altmann voted with the rest of Council to withdraw [8] the City of East Lansing from membership in the Chamber of Commerce.

Asked on Friday by email about his latest endorsement by the Chamber PAC, Meadows' campaign did not respond.

On Friday, Gregg explained her acceptance of the endorsement this way: "I am a small business owner and one of the things I am hoping to do as a Council Member is to make East Lansing a more attractive location for new businesses and a healthier, more vital area for our existing businesses. In that context I thought working with the Chamber of Commerce made sense for my campaign."

The Chamber's mailer effectively extends the resources of the Meadows and Gregg campaigns, as the printing and distribution of such a mailer can cost upwards of \$3,000.

Chamber PAC links Meadows and Gregg ? but are they linked?

Gregg has been seen by a number of supporters as an alternative to incumbents Meadows and Altmann, and some have told ELi that they won't support Gregg if she is linked to Meadows.

Local business owner Nancy Cuddeback told ELi on the record, "Personally, I don't see the Chamber endorsement as anything negative, but I was taken aback by the implication that Jessy and Mark Meadows are running as a team."

Cuddeback, whose business owns and manages rental properties in East Lansing, said, "I am supporting Jessy because she appears to be thoughtful, intelligent, and analytical, (and a pleasant person as well!). Also, she knows what it takes to run a business, so I would hope that she will be respectful of other people who are trying to do the same."

She added, "I would simply say I don't think Mark Meadows has consistently demonstrated those qualities (thoughtful, analytical) in his years on City Council."

Asked for a response, Gregg wrote on Friday, "I am not running with Mark Meadows but I am not running against him either. With 6 candidates running for 3 open seats I am open to working with any candidate who is voted onto the Council. If both Mark and I are elected I expect that we will be able to work together for the benefit of East Lansing's residents."

The mailer contained only a subtle indication that it was being paid for by the Chamber's PAC ? namely one line in the return address.

Why was the mailer made to look something like a joint mailer from Meadows? and Gregg's campaign?

The Chamber's Vice President for Government Relations and Public Policy Steve Japinga tells ELi, "The mailer was designed to emphasize the candidates and their strengths, as well as how those strengths will help them continue to move East Lansing forward."

In a post on Facebook yesterday ^[9], Gregg did more distancing of her campaign from Meadows?, writing, "My campaign is not connected to Mayor Meadows in any way other than the fact that we have both been recognized by the Chamber."

You can see ELi's voter guide here ^[2], and take our survey on issues that matter to you by clicking here ^[10].

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