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## Republicans all smiles despite outlook

### Porter, supporters see good in being underdogs

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From right, Robert "Mike" Duncan, Republican National Committee chairman, is shown voter-tracking technology by David Cerrone, while Kevin Smith and Michael Beach watch Saturday in Henderson. Photo by Martin S. Fuentes/Review-Journal

Why are all these Republicans smiling?

To hear the pundits tell it, it's already over for the GOP this November. They might as well start planning for next season, like a Chicago Cubs fan around the All-Star break.

But the Republicans who gathered in Henderson on Saturday wore smiles of defiant perseverance.

"Some people might consider us the underdogs," Phelicia DeRosier said. "But underdogs work really hard, and underdogs often win."

DeRosier was sitting Saturday at a picnic table in Discovery Park, among a few dozen die-hard Republicans who volunteered to spend the sunny spring day knocking on doors, looking for converts.

Wearing a McCain for president button, DeRosier said she knows 2008 looks to be a tough year for Republicans, but she was feeling optimistic.

"I was for McCain when he was in fifth place" for the Republican nomination, DeRosier said. "People looked at me like I had four heads, but I said, 'We're going to win.' Sometimes, when people say it can't be done, that's an opportunity to show what can be done."

Across the country, the Democratic candidates have outdrawn Republicans in turnout in primaries and caucuses. That was the case in Nevada, where 117,000 attended Democratic caucuses on Jan. 19, versus 44,000 who went to Republican caucuses.

The grass-roots organization that intensified with the caucuses helped Democrats build an edge of more than 40,000 active registered voters statewide over the Republicans.

But Republicans insist that their grass-roots efforts are only beginning and that they have plenty of time over the next seven months to make their case. Saturday's event was an attempt to get started turning the tide.

"We've got 200-some days until the election," said Robert "Mike" Duncan, chairman of the Republican National Committee, who kicked off the Henderson voter registration canvass Saturday morning. "My message is, we need to get more Republicans registered to vote. This is a very fast-growing area in a very fast-growing state."

Grass-roots organizing is crucial in politics, he said. "When my uncle ran for office many years ago, he lost by eight votes." That was in a race for schools superintendent in Scott County, Tenn., in 1960. "President Bush won Nevada by 20,000 votes in 2004. Every vote is important."

Duncan said Republicans were "dispirited" when he became chairman after the 2006 election, in which Democrats took both houses of Congress from Republican control. But he said the mood has improved since then.

The Republican National Committee has a substantial financial advantage over its Democratic counterpart, with more than \$25 million in cash on hand as opposed to less than \$5 million for the Democrats, he said. Speaking to a dinner of the Clark County Republican Party Saturday evening, Duncan said the party will report raising \$35 million in the first three months of 2008.

And since McCain was crowned as the party's presidential nominee, he has given the party a rallying point that the Democrats, whose candidates are still deadlocked, do not yet have.

"I'd rather be me than Chairman Dean right now," Duncan said, referring to Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

**The Republican volunteers on Saturday were trying out some new technology: BlackBerry wireless devices programmed with databases of voter information, allowing them to target the homes of people not registered to vote.**

**On Election Day, they will be used for voter turnout. Poll watchers can check off the list people who have already voted, allowing party volunteers to keep calling only those who haven't.**

The databases were of limited use in neighborhoods that change rapidly, volunteers reported. They said the streets they walked in this affluent suburban area were lined with foreclosure notices, bank lockboxes and "For Sale" signs. Many of the homes were occupied by renters.

"It's a scary sign of the times to see that," said Allison Skartvedt, 38. "For me, as a Republican, I think, the Democrats want to do all these new (government) programs. Who's going to pay for them if everybody's broke and getting foreclosed?"

Her husband, 40-year-old Ward Skartvedt, a handyman, said, "I definitely think it's going to be a tough year for Republicans. But I believe in the Republican ideals. It's not over yet. We still have a fighting chance if we stand up for what we believe in."

Democratic gains in Nevada are particularly worrying to Rep. Jon Porter, the Republican whose Clark County district includes Henderson.

He has seen his congressional district go from being evenly split between the two parties to today having 21,000 more Democrats than Republicans.

Porter, who is running for re-election to a fourth term, spoke to the group Saturday and acknowledged the realities he faces.

"Democrats have done a better job than we have until now," he said. "They're up 20,000. I guarantee you, with your help and continued support, at the end of the day, we're going to close that gap."

Porter's race is thought to be one of the most competitive in the country this year. His likely opponent is Robert Daskas, a former Clark County prosecutor who is getting lots of help from national Democrats.

But Porter told the group that his constituents will remember the work he's done in his decades of public life, from the Boulder City Council to the state Senate to the U.S. House.

"At the end of the day, it's not about registration," he said. It's about projects like the solar power plant in Boulder City, "a project I worked on as mayor. I was involved in that from the beginning."

Porter said this race is likely to be his hardest yet, but "every race I have taken on over the years has been the most difficult, from knocking on doors in Boulder City to the last race to this race."

In 2006, Porter beat a first-time candidate by less than 2 percentage points and less than 4,000 votes.

"This will be another one- or two-point win, but we will win," he said.

Porter voiced the view that the continuing fight for the nomination between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama will benefit Republicans.

"Clinton and Obama are so busy beating each other up. They talk about change, but they're providing more of the same, just attacking each other," Porter said. "Six months ago, I would not have been as optimistic for the party. Every time I turn on the TV, I'm more optimistic."

Attendees at Saturday's canvass could take their pick of campaign T-shirts: some for McCain, some for Porter, some for state Sen. Joe Heck and some for Sean Fellows, a candidate for the Assembly.

Fellows' campaign materials don't mention his party affiliation and emphasize traditional Democratic issues like education and health care. Fellows says he isn't trying to downplay his partisan loyalty, but wants to appeal to voters of all stripes.

"When I knock on doors, people say, 'Aren't you a Republican?'" he said.

"I'm proud to say I am a Republican, but I serve my party best when I serve Nevada first. I talked to an Obama supporter who said, 'Didn't you see the sticker on my car? What are you doing here?' I said, this is about the things that affect your life every day, no matter what party you belong to."

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