

Campaign Views

By John M. Wylie II

Misreading the public

Some key Rogers County Democrats are puzzled, and some are downright angry, about the decision by **Charles Padgett** to challenge **State Sen. Stratton Taylor** in the Democratic primary.

Padgett claims to have polled voters and found that Taylor is providing inadequate representation of his district. We don't know who Padgett talked to, but we have trouble believing they were a representative sample of the voters in Rogers and Mayes counties, especially Democratic voters.

Padgett claims that only the elite know who Stratton Taylor is. Malarkey. Taylor is among the most accessible, visible public officials we've known in 20 years of covering politics. We can't count the times we've heard inmates on their way from court to the Rogers County Jail threatening deputies with, "I'm gonna call Stratton Taylor and then you'll be in trouble." Even the lowest elements of society in Rogers County know exactly who Stratton Taylor is, and how much he can get done when the cause is just. (Jailers tell us they haven't heard from him yet about the latest batch of yelling inmates, and don't expect to.)

Some party leaders are angered because, in a year when Taylor could be helpful to many key Democratic candidates, he must instead face a challenge from within his own party.

Stratton Taylor has built political support the old fashioned way: he earned it. He is scrupulous about not spending taxpayer money for private projects, so scrupulous that we've seen him pay for things out of his own pocket that any other politician would bill to the state.

He has built his political support by taking care of his constituents' needs. The latest example is his quick action to help avoid cutbacks in the meal program at the Claremore Senior Citizens Center. But think back over the years: when we needed help with telephone problems, Stratton Taylor was there. When we needed help with highway problems, Stratton Taylor was there. We have a Veterans Center in Claremore because Stratton Taylor found a creative way to get it financed. The list goes on and on.

Yet, unlike pork barrel politicians, Stratton Taylor always balances the needs of his district against the best interests of Oklahoma as a whole, and finds a way to serve both. It is no accident that he chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee. He chairs it because his colleagues trust his fairness, integrity and honesty.

Mr. Padgett, of course, has the right to run. But we've seen nothing in his candidacy so far to convince us that he is a viable contender. The fact that a resurgent Republican Party could field no candidate should be instructive. And that's why some key Democrats are upset.