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# GOP volunteer says most Democrats against removing Confederate statue



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A large majority of registered Democrats in Jessamine County don't want the Confederate statue in front of the courthouse removed, a Republican who is doing an informal phone survey.

Robert Barney is a Civil War history enthusiast and a volunteer for the Republican Party of Jessamine County. He admits his interest in the past isn't the only reason he's doing the survey. It's also about politics.

Carolyn Dupont, an Eastern Kentucky University history professor and Democratic candidate for state representative, is "the queen statue removers," Barney said, and he's got evidence, including a video of a speech she gave advocating removal of the Jefferson Davis statue from the state Capitol Rotunda and an op-ed for The Washington Post in which she favorably mentions removal of Confederate statues in Virginia.

Matt Lockett, the Republican candidate Barney is supporting for the 39th District, said what Barney is working on is "all him."

"I know what he's doing," Lockett said, but "it's not a part of my state representative campaign."

Dupont doesn't believe it.

"What he's doing is not a survey, it's a smear tactic," Dupont said, calling Barney "Matt Lockett's errand boy."

Barney said the survey was his initiative, although he "cleared it" with Lockett beforehand and has shared the results with him.

He said he "took a personal interest" when he heard there was a petition to have the statue removed.

Jenna Sparks, 15, collected 663 signatures, 540 of them on the website Care2.com around the end of June, and The Jessamine Journal published the first week of July.

Barney began his survey about June 25, after the primary election but before the results were known.

He said he questioned only Democrats because he believes Republicans are more likely than Democrats to oppose removing statues.

Barney has been working from a list of 13,500 registered Democrats in the 39th Kentucky House District. As of last Wednesday, he had 767 Jessamine County Democrats and found that 71 percent of them opposed removing the statue, 20 percent supported its removal, and 9 percent were undecided.

"I'm putting in about three hours a night on this survey," Barney said.

The end of June was also when the statue of the Confederate president was relocated from the Capitol. Five years before, Dupont had given a speech advocating its removal. She also was one of 72 historians who signed a letter to then Gov. Steve Beshear proposing it.

As for the op-ed she wrote for The Washington Post, that was a defense of Gov. Ralph Northam against allegations he should resign because he wore blackface at party in college. The commentary, "The Left's Quest for Purity Could Destroy Potentially Worthy Leaders," was an act of progressive "cancel culture," Dupont explained. In the op-ed, the professor asked whether Northam's actions as governor, including removal of Confederate statues, outweighed his youthful transgressions.

The first question Barney asks in his survey is whether the person being questioned supported the removal of the Davis statue. As of last Wednesday, 69 percent did not, 22 percent did, and 12 percent were undecided.

A third question on the survey is whether the person being polled knows the statue at the courthouse is that of a Confederate soldier.

He only asks that question if they say they don't want it removed.

About half of those polled realize it's a rebel soldier, he said, and some mention that it was originally a Union soldier.

### **Divided legacy**

The statue was cast as a Union soldier in the late 19th century, but the buyer never paid for it, so a group of Jessamine County citizens who honor the Southern dead buried in Maple Grove Cemetery got it at a discount, altered the insignia from USA to CSA, and dedicated it in 1896 attended by a large crowd at the courthouse.

There the statue has stood for 124 years, except in the mid-1990s, when it was taken down to be cleaned and restored and put back up the next year.

In the aftermath of the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, there has been a push to remove statues celebrating the Confederacy.

"It's been fun for me as I've talked to Democrats in Jessamine County ... about their various reasons" for wanting the statue taken down. Some believe "anything related to slavery needs to be removed," and others say it "stands for white supremacy," but Barney said he ca

"It's history, and good, bad or otherwise, we need not forget it," he said.

Jessamine County Judge-Executive David West, a Republican, wants to make the memorial into one that will represent both sides in and include markers that put the statue into a contemporary historical context.

"I think he's changing history, and I think it's a foolish thing to do," Barney said.

He said it would irritate those who want it left as it is, and moving it to another location, such as Maple Grove Cemetery, won't solve : still represent what it represents.

"Sometimes compromise doesn't give everyone what they want," said West, who hopes to have a proposal before the Fiscal Court in weeks.

### Campaign issue

Pastor Moses Radford of First Baptist Church in Nicholasville was one of the Democrats Barney surveyed. He said said he went beyo questions.

"We went round and round for a good while," said Radford, who called Barney's tactics "manipulative."

Dupont said she has heard similar complaints.

Dupont said she is running a campaign to "raise the level of our political discourse, to help us transcend the incredible contentious: political climate, and these attacks are just the opposite of that."

"They increase the animosity and the hyper-partisanship and diminish all of us," she said.

Lockett isn't critical of Barney's survey. There is nothing about it that is not factual, he said.

The Republican is critical, though, of Gov. Andy Beshear spending \$225,000 in taxpayers' money to remove the Jefferson Davis statu involving the General Assembly.

Lockett's campaign website, under the tab On the Issues, says the country is "under attack" from liberals and leftists who want to "er: history," and citizens "must stand against the arbitrary removal" of monuments.

"I would hope that as Americans, we would learn the lessons of history" and would "want to be inclusive of every race," Lockett told T

Dupont said she hasn't taken any position on the statue at the Jessamine County Courthouse.

It's a county issue, she said, and she's running for a state office.

### ABOUT RANDY PATRICK



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