

Gaines to face fellow Republican Pugno in Assembly race

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

The race is officially on in the 6th Assembly District.

Republican Assembly candidate Andrew Pugno announced Monday that he plans to move forward with his bid to unseat Assemblywoman Beth Gaines, R-Rocklin, on the Nov. 6 ballot, despite an earlier pledge to stop campaigning if another Republican came in first in the June primary.

The Folsom attorney said in a statement that he has concluded he “cannot, in good conscience, endorse (Gaines’) dishonest and unethical campaign tactics,” citing what he called “last-minute attack ads that she knew were lies.”

“As the only other candidate on the November ballot, stepping aside and simply handing the election to Beth Gaines would be fundamentally unfair to the voters in light of a primary election tainted by her blatant dishonesty,” Pugno said in the statement. “Whether or not the incumbent should be re-elected is a decision that belongs to the voters, not just to me.”

Pugno said at the launch of his campaign that if Gaines got more votes in the primary he would “endorse her campaign and not actively campaign myself.”

Both Republicans went on the attack in the safe GOP district ahead of the June primary, which also featured a Democrat who failed to make the runoff. One mail piece sent by the Gaines campaign in the final days of the race included misleading and false claims about Pugno’s business and involvement in a nonprofit that organizes junkets for lawmakers.

Despite coming in second to Gaines in the June primary, Pugno continued to raise money this summer as he weighed whether to drop his campaign. Monday marked the first time Pugno – the lead attorney for Proposition 8, the voter-passed state initiative against gay marriage – made his plans for the remainder of the election public.

Gaines' political consultant, Dave Gilliard, criticized Pugno for not following through with the pledge. He said he believes his candidate is better positioned to reach out to Democratic and independent voters in the newly drawn district, which includes southern Placer County, Folsom, Fair Oaks, Orangevale and El Dorado Hills.

"I don't think the voters will let him wiggle his way out of that pledge," Gilliard said.

The race is one of more than two dozen Nov. 6 contests featuring two candidates of the same political party affiliation, an outcome allowed under the state's new top-two primary rules.