

## Article on ending publicly funded schools emerges as 11th District campaign issue

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen  
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 10/22/2010 02:31:19 PM PDT

Updated: 10/23/2010 08:32:11 AM PDT

The nationally targeted 11th Congressional District is generating tens of thousands of dollars in campaign ads and mailers, which predictably contain a mix of truth, distortion and outright falsehoods.

The biggest flap centers on GOP nominee David Harmer's 11-year-old treatise on the ills of public schools and his advocacy for school vouchers.

Harmer, who is challenging Democratic Rep. Jerry McNerney, wrote in a 2000 newspaper opinion piece, "So long as the state constitution mandates free public schools, a voucher system (or refundable tuition tax credit) is the best we can do. To attain quantum leaps in educational quality and opportunity, however, we need to separate school and state entirely. Government should exit the business of running and funding schools."

Asked directly during an editorial board meeting at the Times if he believes what he wrote, Harmer said no.

The article, along with an in-depth Cato Institute piece, was intended to provoke debate, said Harmer, an attorney. After all, his four children attend San Ramon public schools and his wife, Elayne, is a substitute teacher in the district.

But Harmer's statement is a tad Clintonesque.

He still supports vouchers, which would enable parents to send their children at taxpayer expense to private and parochial schools. In his Cato piece, he wrote that he believed vouchers would eventually lead to the dismantling of public schools because most parents would opt

for privately run and presumably higher quality schools.

"I don't believe public schools should be abolished," Harmer told the editorial board. "What I believe is that every child deserves access to a quality education."

Harmer has come under considerable fire for his view on public education, with coverage in national publications such as Mother Jones and Vanity Fair, and mailers from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and California Democratic Party.

McNerney's campaign cites it as "another example of Harmer's extremist right-wing views."

"No matter how hard David Harmer tries to mislead voters, he wrote two separate articles calling for the complete elimination of our kids' public schools," said McNerney campaign spokeswoman Sarah Hersh. "... His long track record of extreme views on education is clear, and his radical stance would harm millions of Californians."

As for anti-McNerney mailers, with a few



We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at [RealBusiness.com](http://RealBusiness.com)

Ready For Real Business 

Print Powered By 

# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

expectations, the bulk of the literature focuses on an accurate reflection of a voting record that his opponents hope will upset voters, such as his support of the \$787 billion stimulus bill, health insurance reform, cap-and-trade energy legislation and the bank bailout.

Here is a look at selected other assertions about Harmer's record:

- What it says: "Harmer signed a pledge that opposed holding big oil companies accountable for disasters like the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico, leaving taxpayers to pay the bill." And "If there is an oil spill, David Harmer thinks taxpayers should pay for the cleanup."
- Is it true? Yes and no. Harmer signed the Americans for Tax Reform's Taxpayer Protection Pledge, a vow to oppose tax increases. Americans for Tax Reform is a nonprofit think tank led by conservative Grover Norquist. It may be a stretch to assume that Harmer's support of the pledge translates into an endorsement for taxpayer-funded cleanup of oil spills. It was the tax reform group that wrote on its website that legislative approval of an oil tax hike, which included industry contributions to the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, constituted a violation of its no-new-taxes pledge.
- What it says: "Wall Street corporate lawyer David Harmer's Plan: Cuts guaranteed benefits and gambles your economic security in the stock market."
- Is it true? No, but Harmer does support shifting Social Security out of government hands into individual control. Harmer never worked on Wall Street. He was first vice president and assistant counsel

for Washington Mutual's credit card division in Pleasanton. Though he does advocate for personal accounts, he says he has never suggested individuals invest that money in the stock market. He believes people should own and control the money they currently

invest in Social Security.

**Contact Lisa Vorderbrueggen at 925-945-4773, [lvorderbrueggen@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:lvorderbrueggen@bayareanewsgroup.com), [IBABuzz.com/politics](http://IBABuzz.com/politics) or [Twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen](http://Twitter.com/lvorderbrueggen).**

## Help people in need.

Donate your car, boat or RV

**Free Towing ■ Tax Deductible**



**FREE**  
3 day vacation to over  
80 destinations.

Call Toll-Free

# 1-877-225-9384



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™