

Judge Boots Google Lawyer Off Ballot

By Cheryl Miller

SACRAMENTO — A Sacramento judge on Wednesday disqualified Google attorney Vinesh Singh Rathore as a candidate for the hotly contested 17th Congressional District, saying the late-filing Republican had failed to submit enough valid nominating signatures.

In a hastily arranged hearing—held one day before the secretary of state is slated to publish a list of certified candidates for the June primary election—Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Allen Sumner rejected two Rathore signatories whose names and addresses appeared to be written in the same handwriting of two other petition signers. Because Rathore submitted only the minimum number of qualifying signatures, 40, the disqualification of two names triggered his removal from the ballot.

Jeffrey Wald, a member of the Alameda County Republican Central Committee, sued to kick the names of Rathore and Joel Vanlandingham, a tech recruiter, off the ballot. The two relatively unknown Republicans registered to run in the South Bay's 17th District in the final days of the filing period. That fueled speculation that Democrat Ro Khanna had recruited the two men in an attempt to dilute the vote among three GOP candidates—Fremont Republican Vanilla Singh had already filed—so that he could advance in California's top-two primary election. Incumbent Democrat Mike Honda is expected to secure one of those spots.

Khanna spokesman Tyler Law said in an email before Wednesday's hearing that Khanna "had nothing to do with anyone entering this race."

But some of Khanna's supporters may have, according to evidence submitted to the court. Wald's attorneys noted that



Jason Dohy

Democratic candidate Ro Khanna

one 17th District resident who signed election documents for Khanna also circulated a petition on behalf of Vanlandingham.

"It's disingenuous," said Wald attorney Patricia McCoy Smith. "If that person is supporting one candidate, why are they circulating a petition for another candidate?"

Smith is a partner with Dhillon & Smith in San Francisco. Fellow partner Harmeet Dhillon is vice chairwoman of the California Republican Party.

Other registered voters who signed papers for Khanna also signed Vanlandingham's nominating petition, the lawyers said.

But Sumner said he could find nothing in California's election laws barring the type of cross-candidate support cited, and he refused to disqualify Vanlandingham.

"If I'm going to exclude someone from the ballot, I want more than just public policy arguments," the judge said.

Neither Rathore nor Vanlandingham attended Wednesday's hearing, telling the court via email that they were only alerted to the proceedings on Tuesday and could not make arrangements to be there. Both men denied being recruited to join the race.

Khanna, a former Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati associate, made political waves when he announced last year that he would challenge Honda, who has served seven terms in a district that includes Sunnyvale, Cupertino, parts of San Jose and Fremont. A favorite of Valley tech executives, Khanna has outpaced Honda in fundraising and recently released his first television ad.

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