

Group seeks conservative majority in House

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A nonprofit group is sponsoring candidate training sessions around Kentucky in hopes of electing a conservative majority in the state House of Representatives.

Richard Nelson, executive director of the Commonwealth Policy Center, said his organization, which held a training summit Oct. 19 in Madisonville, recruits and backs legislative candidates.

Last year, the center endorsed 34 candidates, including three Democrats and one independent, according to Nelson. The remainder were Republicans.

Endorsements are based on a candidate's willingness to support core conservative values — including sanctity of life, religious freedom, marriage between one man and one woman and sound fiscal policies — rather than political affiliation, he said.

"Our commitment is more to conservative principles and values than we are to any one political party," said Nelson, who is a magistrate in Trigg County. "We are looking for principled candidates in any party that will support those core values."

Nelson previously worked for the Family Foundation of Kentucky, a nonprofit group that focuses on policy issues.

He established the policy center, which has a board of directors, 18 months ago as a 501c4, enabling it to raise money and be engaged politically.

The new organization has no connection to the Family Foundation, which is restricted from being involved with political campaigns, he said.

"I just felt this leading — calling if you will — to move in a more political direction," he said. "I think we live in a time when we need to have principled leaders serving in our state House. I did not see any effort out there like what we're doing now."

More than 70 people participated in the Madisonville training session, including a half-dozen state legislators. Two media representatives discussed how to approach media interviews.

State Rep. Ben Waide, a Madisonville Republican, conducted a session on the importance of raising campaign funds.

Democrats are the majority party in the House, holding 54 seats compared to 45 for Republicans. There also is an open seat in the 7th District, which will be filled during a special election on Dec. 10.

Reapportionment of district boundaries, controlled in the House by Democrat leadership, may make it tougher for the Republicans to make further inroads next year.

State Rep. Myron Dossett, a Pembroke Republican, said the GOP's chance of winning

HOUSE

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a House majority hinges on recruiting quality candidates who can raise money and appeal to conservatives, regardless of party affiliation.

Much of the Republican Party's legislative gains in recent years stems from electing candidates in western Kentucky, he said.

"In my present district, you're looking at probably 65 percent Democratic (voter registration)," he said. "That's what Christian County is.

It took a lot of Democrat votes, not only Republican votes, to get me elected into office."

Between now and next year's elections, the Commonwealth Policy Center plans to interview candidates and decide which ones to endorse.

It also will publish a voter guide.

Much of the efforts will focus on House races, where there is the biggest need to find conservative leaders, Nelson said.

"We are very interested in seeing a conservative majority in the House," he said. "That's our goal."

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