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Burpo campaign staffer resigns

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By STEVE TERRELL

Joshua Zader quit as Burpo's Web site master after candidate called for professor's firing

A campaign staffer for Republican gubernatorial candidate Rob Burpo has resigned, partly because Burpo came out for the firing of controversial University of New Mexico history professor Richard Berthold.

Joshua Zader quit as Burpo's Web site master, saying, "Berthold is a valuable member of the university community, despite his outbursts" and in fact should be considered a hero by conservatives.

Last week Burpo, a state representative from Albuquerque, and other GOP legislators spoke at a news conference at UNM calling for the university to fire Berthold, a 29-year tenured professor.

Burpo on Monday stood by his position.

Berthold on Sept. 11, not long after the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. told a freshman history class, "anyone who can blow up the Pentagon has my vote."

The quip sparked an explosive controversy after Rep. William Fuller, R-Albuquerque -- whose son works in the Pentagon -- blasted Berthold on the floor of the state House of Representatives.

Berthold repeatedly has apologized for the remark, which he's described as a "poor attempt at humor."

"What's most appalling to me is how willing people who don't know (Berthold) are willing to reach the conclusion that he's a radical leftist on the basis of one sarcastic, off-the-cuff remark," Zader told a reporter Monday.

Zader, a graduate student in psychology and a self-described "principled advocate of freedom," said he took Berthold's western-civilization class and has worked with the professor in various student organizations.

In his resignation letter to the Burpo campaign, obtained by The New Mexican, Zader wrote, "firing him would pose not only a loss to the university but also set an unacceptable precedent."

Zader said Berthold "is a rare, outspoken advocate of Western civilization and a card-carrying member of the National Association of Scholars, the conservative organization fighting to keep the Western canon in the core curriculum at universities around the country.

"Even more importantly in the hearts and minds of many students, Berthold is one of the few faculty members willing to stand up and publicly say 'the emperor has no clothes' when the leftist multiculturalist feminist revisionists on campus go off the deep end," Zader wrote. "In the process, he often makes these factions quite angry, and no one would be more exulted than they to see him fired."

Berthold caused another controversy at UNM last semester for calling a leader of the Black Student Union "an idiot."

"It's a tribute to my position that I get attacked by the left and the right," Berthold told a reporter last month. "To me, the far left and the far right are the same. The left is probably worse, though, because they're hypocrites."

Burpo, a 1971 graduate of UNM, said Monday he believes Berthold crossed the line by making his statement in the classroom.

"Berthold has the right to say whatever he wants outside the classroom," Burpo said. "If he said it in a speech outside the Student Union Building, I'd defend his right to say it, as disgusting as it is to me. But what the professor said has no place in the classroom."

Burpo said he would defend UNM against any attempt to have its funds cut as a result of the Berthold controversy.

Zader also wrote that he was resigning because of the removal of Burpo's political consultant, Mike Weber, in August. Weber got in trouble over a leaked memo he wrote calling potential Burpo gubernatorial rival Rep. John Sanchez, R-Albuquerque, a "lightweight."