

What is a RINO? (Published as a guest editorial in the Journal on Saturday, 5-27-23)

Many who regularly criticize the Oconee County Conservatives (OCC), which is still the largest Conservative movement in Oconee County, seem to be upset because of our use of the term “RINO”, which is an acronym for “Republican In Name Only”. These people claim that we can’t really define it or know what it means, so let me try to explain.

The SC Republican platform contains the following fundamental principles:

- * The Right to Life
- * Religious Liberty
- * Private Property
- * Personal Responsibility
- * Traditional Values
- * Limited, Constitutional Government
- * State Sovereignty
- * Low Taxes
- * Personal Right to Keep and Bear Arms
- * Strong National Defense & Secure Borders

The OCC believes these ten principles constitute the minimum expectations that should be followed by someone claiming to be a Republican. These fundamental principles are further expanded upon in the details of the SC Republican platform. Out of a need to hold local office holders accountable for their decisions as they pertain to this platform, a more specific OCC platform was also developed using the details of the SC Republican platform, tailored to local politics, to more clearly define a vision of what constitutes adequate compliance with each of these principles. The OCC was formed due to concerns and observations that people who claimed to be Republicans in Oconee County were not really adhering to most of the fundamental principles of the SC Republican platform. Rather, what many of us observed in local governance was a willingness to continually compromise these values, and even abandon them, to appease Progressives, to stave off criticisms, to avoid loss of friends and influence, and to assuage the special interests with the loudest voices or those with the deepest pockets.

We all weave a tangled political web in this county. Many Progressives and so-called “Republicans” run in the same circles, went to school together, and are in the same families. While often practicing under different belief systems at a LOCAL level, these people claim to vote and believe the same politics at a state and federal level. It is one thing to say what you believe at a local level, but it’s another thing to actually practice it. Particularly at the local level, you actually have to implement your political belief system to be consistent- you can’t just “talk” a good game. Voting records, meeting minutes, YouTube videos of the public meetings, and other media outlets place your beliefs “on the record”. When you vote or implement local policies based on a set of principles, you often make enemies and offend people. It takes fortitude to consistently stick to your principles and practice what you preach.

So then, what differentiates a true Conservative Republican from a RINO? A true Conservative Republican implements policy based on strict adherence to essentially ALL of the fundamental SC Republican platform principles stated above. The OCC expects at least 90% compliance based on ACU (American Conservative Union) ratings. You can see ratings here:

(Unfortunately, these ratings only go through 2021 and only address state and federal legislator voting records.)

A RINO will almost always provide an excuse as to why they don't necessarily need to adhere to a platform principle. For example, a RINO might say, we don't need a proclamation for a county "right to life sanctuary" because "it's just wasting the county's time and doesn't really have any enforcement capabilities", or, we need to spend this extra money in the budget "because we will get matching funds" - after all, if we don't get the free stuff, someone else will. We need to implement this property-rights restricting ordinance because "it will preserve the environment" or "it will make things look better around the county". RINOs do not consistently adhere to a palpable political belief system or core set of tenets because they are distracted by the money and influence from outside interests. As a result, when you try to pin a RINO down on what their core belief system is, it is at best inconsistent and most often undefined. This trait of "not being principled" also makes a local official readily accessible to corruption and bribery. When you don't really practice local governance based on a coherent set of principles, you can always justify that what you did was the "right thing for the people".

Where's the accountability? There is none. The OCC is all about accountability. We strive to hold individuals in local government accountable to those who got them elected. We believe in Representative Government. If the office holder was elected because they claimed to be a Republican, then they are accountable to their constituents to consistently adhere to the SC Republican platform. Likewise, an elected Democrat is responsible for adhering to the SC Democratic platform. A Democrat will at least adhere to their set of principles, like them or not - the voter at least knows what they are getting for their vote. Not so much with a RINO.

If you "sometimes" adhere to the SC Republican Platform, is that good enough to claim you are a Republican? No. 50% is not good enough ! Nor is 60%! At least it should not be. If a person is pro-abortion, or even for an abundance of exceptions to it, in favor of almost every budget increase without questioning the need for it, states with respect to CRT that "it can't happen here", prefers to spend money on UN Agenda 21 items rather than to fund basic infrastructure, is in favor of zoning ordinances and increased property restrictions, and in favor of displacement of local practices and traditions to make room for foreign ones, then how can they really with good conscience claim to be a Republican?

The fight for our freedoms begins right here locally. Most of us who live busy home and working lives will not and cannot make much of a difference at the state or federal level, but we can definitely make a difference here locally in our county. Our freedoms are being slowly eroded piece by piece, because the human nature of legislators is always to add more rules and regulations to "protect", "provide safety", "provide security", and avoid private litigation issues, all at the cost of removing a little more of your freedoms each time. It is "death by a thousand cuts". In the corporate world, it is called "organizational drift", and it is checked by vigilance, awareness, and courageous action. In conclusion, the RINO is a complacent, compliant, go-along to get-along entity that simply allows erosion of freedoms to continue by constant capitulation to the Democrats. Therefore, RINOs are at best a hindrance to the Conservative movement in this county and should be replaced at every opportunity with bold Conservatives who are willing to stand and fight for true Conservative governance. The Freedom Caucus in Washington fights this fight at the Federal level, the SC Freedom Caucus fights at the state level, and the OCC is committed to fight this fight at the county and municipal level. Please join us in our efforts to make Oconee great!

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