

## **Eichelberger Leaves Cumberland GOP Citing Deceit, Dysfunction and Corruption; Registers as Conservative, Ending Republican Majority on Board**

Statement by Cumberland County Commissioner Gary Eichelberger (CONTACT: 717-458-4279)

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I am announcing today that following a lifelong affiliation with the Republican party and career of involvement in trying to promote Republican ideals, I have changed my party affiliation to Conservative.

This pains me greatly, however, the Republican party “leadership” in Cumberland County has abandoned cornerstone Republican principles and has repeatedly and increasingly demonstrated overt hostility toward authentic Conservatives, especially in its vicious opposition to my successful policies of smaller government and pro-taxpayer protections. It is unacceptable that this party speaks about conservatism but treats county government, with its supply of jobs, appropriations, grants, contracts and more, as a virtual piggy bank for influence-peddling.

My tenure as County Commissioner has emphasized implementation of better management practices, cost-saving efficiencies, and other pro-taxpayer policies. I came to office as an outsider, not chosen by party bosses. As a result, I have pursued an independent path, unafraid to call out misconduct within my party’s organization and unhesitant to apply accountability standards to party-controlled areas of the county government, including my repeated observation for over a decade that combining some of the elected row offices (outposts of partisan patronage) could save taxpayers significant dollars.

Despite great success over the years in delivering on our promises in County Government -- including nine straight years of no property tax increases -- I was again targeted for defeat by the county’s Republican Committee, just as it had in each of the five prior elections. However, the party machine’s conduct this year was egregious, working in direct collusion with Democratic leaders on a campaign of character assassination and slander against me, first to control the selection of party nominees in the Spring, and failing that, then working jointly to flip the courthouse majority to the Democrats. This illustrates the growing “Spend-a-publican/Spendocrat Uni-party” elitist mentality that now abandons public and taxpayer interests, capitulating to the Big Government message, labeled as “Collaboration.” This is a clear demonstration of the depth of rot within the Republican party organization in recent years, especially under its current chairman, Lou Capozzi, an avid fundraiser for major Democratic candidates in the past.

Mr. Capozzi's blood feud with me stems predominantly from my unwillingness to allow him to personally profit from the sale of the county's nursing home and my refusal to allow him to alter the conduct of county-administered election functions. Demands that we exercise partisan pressure inappropriately have been a constant problem in Cumberland County in recent years.

This has included ongoing demands that commissioners ignore important court rulings on election processes and participate in partisan stunts and statements about election misconduct that undermine public trust in our elections. Capozzi and his lieutenants have been the source of constant threats and attempts to retaliate against those of us who put our Constitutional Oath ahead of narrow, partisan loyalties.

Efforts to compel commissioners to selectively apply election laws to Republican advantage or help spread disinformation are an insult to all voters, and tantamount to promoting abuse of public office and violation of our Constitutional Oath.

Capozzi's mismanagement of the party machinery for his own benefit is a direct extension of the same dismal party stewardship of his predecessor, Greg Rothman, who was compelled to resign from the chairman position under allegations of financial misconduct with party resources.

Further, the bulk of funding for this year's campaign opposition to me was orchestrated via "dark money" channels by Rothman, due in part to his displeasure over:

- 1) The fact we spurned his demands that county COVID relief funds be turned over to him
- 2) Our unwillingness to participate in meaningless partisan theatrics over controversies surrounding pandemic issues and "election integrity."
- 3) Resistance to his pressures to hire the Wolf administration's senior elections official into county employment
- 4) Our board's stated opposition to partisan gerrymandering of districts, and
- 5) Our criticism of the county's legislative delegation's lack of interest in ensuring a fair share of state funds for important local needs.

The county party now functions only as a social club for a small handful of activists/operatives, over-ambitious political climbers and job-seekers – not a vehicle for supporting success for REPUBLICAN PRINCIPLES. They have continued to abuse the party endorsement process, violate local and state party bylaws, and now stooped to expelling publicly-elected members who do not conform in order to rig the candidate selection process favoring compliant party machine insiders. These abuses are clearly intended to protect the club's power to help itself to county tax dollars, and to circumvent the public's right to choose its candidates.

*None of this reflects true conservatism or commitment to basic principles of representative democracy. The Republican Committee leadership has lost its way, seeking only power and influence, devoid of the burden of principles. I encourage other principled Republicans to join me in saying "Enough."*

I have registered as Conservative to ensure there is a conservative voice on the new Board of Commissioners – especially in light of the county government's self-inflicted "bipartisan" budget crisis, a stealth scheme aimed at increasing spending and taxes. The "Republican" committee no longer welcomes or supports authentic conservatives or their policies. Instead, party bosses have cynically hijacked the slogans and talking points of conservatism in their effort to bamboozle voters into supporting their quest for power and control over public assets and policies for self-serving purposes, both political and financial.

My hope is to someday return to the Republican party, but only after its members police their ranks by purging the current band of charlatans like Lou Capozzi, commit to support for core conservative fiscal practices and stop waging war on conservative candidates. I intend to remain active in pushing for corrective action with ongoing activity by the committee I founded, *Republican Principles for Cumberland PAC*. I encourage others to get involved. \*\*\*\*\*END

*NOTE:* The change of registration represents the loss of Republican majority for Cumberland County Board of Commissioners. Earlier this year, Commissioner Vince DiFilippo, originally elected as a Republican, changed his registration to Independent in the wake of his loss in the Republican primary election, however, he re-registered as Republican a month later in order to issue a "bipartisan endorsement" to Democrat Jean Foschi as part of the campaign. Prior to this episode, the Republicans had controlled the county government since the 1980s following a brief Democrat majority for eight years.