

"No politics" at Freedom Fest

Outgoing trustee spars with board member over political booth in Madison Township

By Jared Quigg, MCC Reporter

By Jared Quigg, MCC Reporter

'No politics' at Freedom

Outgoing trustee spars with board member over political booth in Madison Township

By Jared Quigg
MCC Reporter

MADISON TOWNSHIP — His booth was approved weeks ago, then cancelled less than 48 hours before the event. So, Matthew Pranger decided to bring a wagon instead.

Madison Township held its annual



Original front-page clipping and event photo retained from the supplied article capture.

MADISON TOWNSHIP - His booth was approved weeks ago, then cancelled less than 48 hours before the event. So, Matthew Pranger decided to bring a wagon instead.

Madison Township held its annual Freedom Festival, an event that brings families together for car shows, food trucks, live entertainment, fireworks and vendor booths. But at least two political booths were called off last Thursday despite having been approved: one for Pranger and one for the Young Republicans.

The cancellations came at the request of outgoing township trustee Larry Ellis. Ellis said anything political was cancelled because he wanted the event to remain family-friendly.

"We consider Freedom Festival a family-friendly event, and we don't want anyone to be approached about politics," Ellis said.

Jordan Russell, who defeated Ellis in the Republican primary for township trustee, raised concerns about the appearance of the decision. Russell said a political party and a candidate had been denied participation, and that the candidate was also a current township advisory board member who had questioned township financial decisions, appropriations and spending.

Russell said that kind of questioning is part of Pranger doing his job as a board member. Whether the booth cancellation was related or not, Russell said the situation created an appearance that deserved transparency. He called on the community to reach out to Ellis and ask that restrictions on political speech be removed.

Pranger, who is seeking another term on the Madison Township Advisory Board, told The Morgan County Correspondent on Friday that he believed the cancellation was a calculated political move. He said Ellis had not taken kindly to him asking questions at board meetings.

Pranger said he still planned to attend the event and bring a wagon instead of a booth, which he did. The wagon carried campaign materials and a sign reading "Not a Booth." Pranger said he spoke with many families during the event and did not receive pushback from attendees.

Ellis denied that the decision was politically motivated. He said Pranger's booth was not the only one cancelled and that all political booths were cancelled because he wanted to avoid politics at the event.

Ellis also said that in previous years he had been heavily involved with the festival, but this year the committee at the fire department handled the planning and he had been left out of the loop. Had he been involved earlier, Ellis said, he would never have approved Pranger's booth or the Young Republicans' booth.

Ellis did not attend the Freedom Festival because he was out of state.

Pranger was caucused onto the Madison Township Advisory Board as a Republican after a vacancy, but he is now seeking a full term on the November ballot as a Libertarian. He said that if Republican Party leaders did not know he was a Libertarian before the caucus, they should have known.

"It was a lack of due diligence on their part," Pranger said of the Republican Party. He said Morgan County Republican Party Chair Carole Snyder assumed he was a Republican.

Snyder disputed that characterization. "There was no mix up," Snyder said. "He never said he was a Libertarian. He had a Republican voting record. He didn't tell any of us in leadership that he wasn't a Republican. He led us all to believe he was a Republican."

All three Madison Township Advisory Board seats will appear on the ballot. Dawn Horock, the fourth-place finisher in the Republican primary, will lose her seat. Nelson Hoggatt placed third and advanced, while Denise McClure and Andrew Endicott placed first and second. Ellis lost the trustee primary to Russell.

For Pranger, the issue remains one of consistency and fair treatment. He said the event form listed political organizations as a vendor category, his booth had been approved, and the cancellation came less than 48 hours before the event. He said he respected the booth cancellation by remaining mobile and not using vendor space or event resources.

The debate left a larger question for Madison Township residents: where public events, township resources, candidate speech and local politics should meet, and who gets to decide when politics is allowed at a community celebration called the Freedom Festival.

What's in a name? Or political affiliation?

Carole Snyder

July 2, 2026 | 3 min. read



When you tell someone, you are a Republican, Democrat or Libertarian, what are you really saying?

The definition of a political party is "an organized group of individuals who share similar ideological views and goals for running government." Sounds simple enough.

If I tell you I am a Republican, you would guess I am a conservative. You probably would think I am pro-life, support less government intervention, etc.

If I told you I was a Democrat, you would think pro-choice, healthcare coverage, etc. If you walked into a voting booth, and you saw a "D" or "R" by a person's name, you would have some idea of what they believe in and what kind of programs the candidate may support.

Where the lines are getting blurred is when a candidate - who has voted, held office or ran as a member of a particular party in the past - has now changed their affiliation.

Now changing party affiliation has been going on since we had political parties. That happens when an ideology of a party is changing or when a person feels more aligned with the ideology of another party.

Currently, we have candidates running as Independents or Libertarians who have a clear voting record supporting the Republican Party, and for whatever reason, they did not run in the primary as a Republican.

I suspect their reasoning for changing parties has nothing to do with changes in their beliefs. Their voting records clearly show their support for the Republican Party. So, being unhappy with the primary results, they have switched to Libertarian or Independent to run against the winner in the primary.

The way the current system is set up, all Republicans and Democrats file early in the year to run in the May primary election. But if you are a Libertarian or Independent, you can file after the primary till July 15. This later filing of the other parties allows those who "forgot" to file in January to "change their party affiliation" and run in the general election.

It would be one thing if you truly were Libertarian or Independent. But if your past voting record shows differently, then I question why you are running now and why you are supposedly changing parties. Has your party affiliation truly changed?

Maybe the answer is to take a hard look at the rules of filing for office so that it is all a level field where all candidates have to declare party affiliation at the same time. I understand that the Libertarians and Independents don't have enough candidates to have their own ballot, but they should know at the same time as the Republicans and Democrats if they are going to run for an office. Making the time to declare the same for all candidates would eliminate this party switching for the wrong reasons.

A party supports its candidates. To be a candidate of a party, you must support it. As chair of a party, it is my job to ensure that the people we have running truly support our party's platform. We also support those people in the elections. All leaders of the party, elected officials and precinct committeemen are held to a different standard than the average voter. We must support who the electorate chose in the primary.

It is as if you are on a board of a bank and you tell people not to go to that bank, and instead, try the one down the street. There would be consequences to your actions. You cannot be part of an organization and actively work against it.

My point is this: You need to have a clear understanding when you are voting as to what party each person supports, and ask yourself, does that align with your values and beliefs? Make sure that the party you support has a candidate who truly is a member of that party. Not just someone who has switched over to be able to run for an office.

I support you in whatever party you choose, whether it is by voting, working in booths and parades, etc.

I don't support, however, those who are trying to use the system to their own advantage. I think it confuses voters by allowing them to believe you have certain ideals when you are really using the "new found party" as a way to circumvent the election system.

So, all I ask is that you be an informed voter. In the general election this November, pay attention to whom you are voting for.

Make sure they support your values, that they support the party you support, and that they are not using it to circumvent the system.

Carole Snyder is the chairman of the Morgan County Republican Party. Contact her at morgancountygop@gmail.com.

It's More Than a Name

By Dr. Matthew Pranger

Carole Snyder recently asked an important question: What's in a name? More specifically, what does a political affiliation really tell voters?

It's a fair question, and one worth discussing.

It doesn't take much digging to realize that I am a Libertarian. I am an active member of the Libertarian Party of Morgan County, attend both the State and National Convention, and have had the privilege of serving as a National Delegate. My affiliation isn't something I discovered after an election or adopted for political convenience. It reflects convictions I've held for years.

When a vacancy opened on the Madison Township Advisory Board, I was approached by both Libertarians and Republicans about participating in the caucus process. That wasn't unusual. Throughout American politics, conservatives, liberals, and independents have worked across party lines when they believed a candidate's character, qualifications, and commitment to the community mattered more than the label beside their name. In local government especially, neighbors often recognize that practical leadership matters more than partisan politics.

I proudly hold conservative beliefs. I am pro-life. I believe in limited government, individual liberty, fiscal responsibility, and the abolition of property taxes. Those principles have guided my decisions long before I sought public office, and they continue to guide me today.

Because of those shared values, I have voted for many Republican candidates throughout my life. I don't simply agree with Republicans on many issues, I have supported them at the ballot box when I believed they were the best people for the job. Likewise, many of my friends,



neighbors, and fellow community members come from every political persuasion imaginable. My advice to each of them is always the same: vote for the most qualified candidate, regardless of the letter next to their name.

Party affiliation is important. It gives voters insight into a candidate's general philosophy and priorities. But a party label should never replace careful evaluation of a person's record, integrity, and service. We've all heard the phrase "Republican in Name Only," and similar criticisms exist within every political party. A party registration, by itself, is not proof of conservative values, sound judgment, or effective leadership.

I identify strongly with the brand of conservatism championed by President Ronald Reagan, who once said, "The very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism." That quote has resonated with me for years because it reflects the considerable overlap between conservative and libertarian principles. If this were the Reagan era, many people would likely consider me a Republican. Today, I remain a Libertarian because I believe it most accurately reflects my commitment to individual freedom, personal responsibility, constitutional government, and local control.

That doesn't mean Libertarians and Republicans agree on everything. Of course they don't. But who agrees on everything? Families and friends disagree. Even members of the same political party frequently disagree on policy and priorities.

Healthy disagreement is part of representative government, and it shouldn't be mistaken for a lack of principle.

Ultimately, local elections should not become a contest over party loyalty. The responsibilities of the Madison Township Advisory Board are straightforward: exercising fiscal oversight, supporting public safety, and making decisions that serve our residents responsibly. Those duties require sound judgment, transparency, and a willingness to listen; not blind allegiance to any political organization, but targeted commitment toward our community.

Since being selected to serve on the Madison Township Advisory Board, I have worked to honor the commitments I made during the caucus process and never called attention to my political affiliation as I understood the trust the GOP put in me. I hope my record demonstrates that I have done exactly what I promised: serve the people of Madison Township with honesty, fiscal responsibility, and respect for taxpayers. I have approached every decision by asking one simple question: What is best for our community?

I would encourage every voter to look beyond the label. Examine each candidate's qualifications. Consider their record of service. Ask whether they have earned your trust through their actions rather than relying solely on the letter printed beside their name.

I am the most qualified candidate to continue serving Madison Township, and I am grateful to everyone who has supported me and believed in my commitment to our community. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve. I hope I've demonstrated that I have upheld the promises I made when I first accepted this responsibility, and I respectfully ask for your support this November to continue serving the township.



**KEEP
T PRANGER**

on



BOARD



MADISON TOWNSHIP ADVISORY BOARD

Paid for by Pranger for Madison Township