

First, I congratulate the candidates who have received the nominations and endorsements of both the Republican and Democratic parties. Public service requires putting yourself before the voters, and I wish each candidate well.

For most of my adult life, I proudly called myself a Republican. As a young man, I was an Orange County Republican, born and raised, long before I came up the hill. I served for two years as a congressional intern under the Honorable Dana Rohrabacher, who taught me much about government and public service. The Republican Party was my political home.

Today, however, I identify as an **Independent Conservative**. My principles have not changed. I remain a patriot and a conservative, and I remain a strong supporter of **President Donald Trump** and the agenda the American people elected him to pursue. Indeed, another reason I have become increasingly leery of the Republican Party is my belief that too often it has **failed to support and defend President Trump as strongly as it should**. In my opinion, Republican leaders have too frequently hesitated when they should have stood firmly behind the President, his agenda, and the millions of Americans who voted for fundamental change.

Of late, I have also developed serious doubts about the Republican establishment in San Bernardino County. I have difficulty placing my faith in a party organization that elevated **Jan Leja** to chair its county central committee after she had agreed to plead guilty to two misdemeanor campaign-finance reporting violations involving knowingly false campaign reports. That history raises serious questions for me about judgment, standards, and accountability.

Now there is an **allegedly brewing scandal surrounding Ontario International Airport**. Federal agents have executed search warrants involving prominent local officials and obtained records connected with the airport. An investigation is not proof of wrongdoing, and I will not presume anyone guilty. But these developments raise legitimate questions, and the response of the local GOP establishment has done nothing to ease my mind.

Republicans cannot demand accountability and transparency from Democrats while accepting a lesser standard from our own side. After years of controversy, insider politics, and establishment maneuvering, conservatives are entitled to ask: **Where are the results?**

That is why I am particularly delighted and proud to have earned the endorsement of the **Bull Moose Project**, a dynamic, young voice for conservatism in Washington, D.C. Its emphasis on American strength, national renewal, working families, and a conservatism willing to challenge stale institutions represents the kind of movement I want to help build.

I will work with Republicans, Democrats, and independents who sincerely want to improve our schools and our community. But I will owe no political establishment my obedience and no party my silence.

Mike Ricotta Jr.
Candidate for District 5
Apple Valley Unified School District