The Governor's Race, From Left to Right

We asked two prominent voices from the political blogosphere to handicap the race for the grand prize in next year's election: the State House. From the left, RIFuture's Matt Jerzyk; and from the right, Anchor Rising's Justin Katz. Now we bring you the opinions of the New Media, in Old Media form. Let the debate begin.

The Left on the Right:
Another CEO for the GOP?

An Overview

My only encounter with a "Rory" to date has been the racer. If you have kids, you probably know the red cartoon racer. No? Well, Rory the Racer just might have more name recognition than Rory Smith, the Republican candidate for Governor in 2010.

What do we know about this Rory Smith? Well, we know he's from East Greenwich. We know that he is an invetstment banker based in Providence. We know he's a self-proclaimed "outsider". And we know that he might have some questionable dealings with money invested in a national outsourcing company - as is outsourcing your job to someone else. Sound familiar?

Don Carcieri was also an investment banker who retired with his wealth in East Greenwich after some questionable dealings, and then came forward as a self-proclaimed "outsider" to proclaim that the saving grace of Rhode Island would be a CEO. What Rhode Island needs is a businessperson in the Governor's office" The only problem is that we got a CEO instead of a Governor.

Conservatives are quick to blame the majority Democratic General Assembly for most of Rhode Island's ills, but that's not fair or accurate. First, many of the so-called Democrats in the General Assembly are DINOs (Democrats In Name Only). These DINOs support tax breaks for the rich, oppose women's rights and gay rights and gang up on immigrants and the poor. In other words, they would be Republicans if they could win an election under that party banner.

Second, not only has most of Carcieri's agenda been supported by the Assembly (tax breaks for the rich, pension reform, E-verify, gay marriage), but for the last 15 years, Rhode Island has had Republican governors who have been responsible for staffing the leaders of all the state's departments - from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Education, as well as nominating the judiciary, setting the political agenda and submitting a balanced budget. If Republican governors can't ably manage government, since they are so "powerless" compared to the Assembly, then why are they running at all?

What Happens Next

Thus, as the ship of state continues to take on water, Rhode Island voters in 2010 will have to wonder whether the Captain should be another CEO Governor. Considering at least 2/3 of Ocean State voters have said that the state is going in the "wrong direction" in the last several Brown University polls, Republican gubernatorial candidate Rory Smith should tread carefully.

But what if former Republican US Senator turned Independent candidate for Governor Lincoln Chafee, you ask? That's a good question - and a tough one.

The good news for Chafee is that as an Independent he doesn't have to battle through a Republican primary like he did in 2006 against Steve Laffey. In fact, he can sit back and watch the likely Democratic candidates - Treasurer Frank Caprio and Attorney General Patrick Lynch - beat each other up. There is a remote possibility that Rory Smith might have a primary too if former Cranston Mayor Steve Laffey, a right-wing Republican, changes his mind and jumps in the race. Since the primary election in September is only a short seven weeks from the general election, Chafee can hold his money, his resources and keep his powder dry until after the primary. In that way, clean and pristine Linc may just ride his electric car straight to the State House.

Would Rhode Island Republicans be happy about Governor Linc? Ah, here's the rub. Similar to the national Republican Party, the Rhode Island GOP has in recent years been taken over by the fringe right-wing, and they froth at the mouth when Chafee's name is mentioned. Good riddance to the traitor who voted against Bush's war, voted against confirming Justice Alito and endorsed Barack Obama - in the Democratic primary no less!

Thus, Linc is as much a persona non grata in the GOP as Max Baucus is in the Democratic Party these days. This schtick has fueled much speculation that the conservative wing of the RI GOP might end up supporting a right-leaning Democrat for Governor: Frank Caprio.

Of course, the irony of this tale is that Republicans historically maintained a power base in New England because of their social liberalism, not in spite of it. The fringe elements of the GOP who are casting out the moderate Republicans might as well be conducting a circular firing squad.

The Governor's office is not the only office up for grabs in 2010. Republicans will do their best to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory in a whole host of other races. Carcieri confidante John Loughlin is running against Congressman Patrick Kennedy and Mark Zaccaria (who?) is running against Congressman Jim Langevin. Look for former Air Force officer Erik Wallen to run for Attorney General. The only Republicans who likely have a shot at winning are moderate Republicans Scott Avedisian and Allan Fung. Avedisian might throw his hat in the ring for Secretary of State or General Treasurer and the popular Fung is running for reelection as mayor of Cranston.

That being said, the Governor's race is where the action is at. And, on November 2, 2010, after 16 years of Republican stewardship, expect Rhode voters to send the GOP ship out to sea.

Matt Jerzyk is a Providence-based civil attorney who blogs frequently at RIFuture.org.