

Fighting For What Is Just & Good Necessitates Demonizing Olson, Wilson And Rendler, Redlands Progressive Leadership Asserts

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Some leading members of the progressive contingent within the Redlands community, a number of whom have been characterized by Candy Olson's and Jeannette Wilson's supporters as vicious, vile and vulgar in propounding their beliefs and being as or even more dogmatic and rigid in their collective mindset than the conservatives they detest, insist they are engaged in an advocacy that is enlightened, humane and kind-spirited. While tacitly acknowledging that their passion has sometimes been articulated profanely, they insist that theirs is a position of rectitude and compassion.

"Please be clear, while we may criticize elected officials for their actions and the policies they promote, accusing us of intimidation or threatening behavior is inaccurate and possibly libelous," the progressive values group Together For Redlands stated in a communication with the *Sentinel* this week. "We never target friends, families, or associates of elected officials. Nor do we engage in intimidation of anyone. We publicize and criticize actions and policies we disagree with in an attempt to keep the public informed and engaged."

Conservative forces in Redlands assert that Together for Redlands and other liberals in the community were not able to prevent a traditional values coalition from taking control of the school board as a result of the 2024 election. The reality is, the traditionalists maintain, that those promoting transgenderism among students, those calling for the presence of gay pride flags on campus and in classrooms, those in favor of indoctrinating students with liberal political ideas, exposing students to radical ideologies and sexually explicit reading material and texts are a minority and a small minority at that, despite being so vocal. Outnumbered and beaten at the ballot box, the progressives, according to the community's conservatives, have turned to bullying and intimidation to get their way.

That is not the case, the progressives counter.

"Characterizing our tactics as bullying without the political muscle to accomplish is wholly inaccurate," Together For Redlands in a group communique told the *Sentinel*. "In fact, California law is on our side as demonstrated by both the Chino and Temecula [school district] flag bans being overturned based on California Public Employment Relations Board litigation. In addition, California law prohibits book bans targeting marginalized communities which is documented as the intent of the Redlands book review policy."

As the district has enacted policy after policy that has not been to the liking of Redlands' progressive contingent over the ten months since Olson and Wilson were sworn into positions on

the school board following their November 2024 election victories, members of the city's conservative set have openly remarked at how politically tone deaf the Redlands liberals are. Instead of courting Michelle Rendler, the swing vote on the school board, the traditionalists point out, the progressives have offended and insulted her with their pointed verbal abuse, personal attacks, profanity and departures from decorum that have plunged the board meetings into chaos. Rendler, as the school board president throughout that time, has labored in vain to officiate over orderly and dignified proceedings. The manner in which the liberal forces have alienated Rendler, those on the now-prevailing establishment's side say, is as much of a factor in the direction the district is now taking as anything else.

Together For Redlands disputed that size-up, saying Rendler was never on a trajectory to see eye-to-eye with its group's members or the other left-leaning residents in the city.

"It is implied that Ms. Rendler is solely reacting to the tactics used by Together For Redlands," the group told the *Sentinel*. "In fact, Ms. Rendler had previously voiced support for banning books and banning flags during previous school boards, but lacked support for such positions until Ms. Olson and Ms. Rendler were elected."

Those taking issue with Together For Redlands' political fundraising efforts are on the wrong track, the group said in its statement to the *Sentinel*, claiming it was permitted to collect money through an adjunct political action committee it has set up, and those which could be expended on electioneering efforts or advocacy with regard to political matters.

"If there are questions about the status of Together For Redlands, we would appreciate the opportunity to hear these questions so that we may provide accurate responses," the group stated. "Together For Redlands has filed as a 501(c)4 and has established a PAC [political action committee]. This enables us to promote the common good and general welfare of the community as well as engage in political activities. Together For Redlands follows all laws and regulations." Under tax code regulations, Section 501(c)(3) organizations are not able to make contributions or pass money through to political organizations such as candidate committees, political party committees or political action committees.

According to Together For Redlands, it is not a section 501(c)(3) organization but rather a nonprofit entity organized under section 501(c)4, which puts it at liberty to make contributions to political organizations described in section 527, to include a candidate committee, political party committee or a political action committee, as long as long as doing so is not the group's primary activity.

To those in Redlands on the right side of the political spectrum, Together For Redlands is involved in politics – underhanded and cutthroat politics – up to the level of its members' eyeballs.

It is not the liberals in Redlands running afoul of fundraising regulations, according to the statement by Together For Redlands, but the community's reactionaries. The group referenced complaints made to the California Fair Political Practices Commission with regard to Olson's campaign funding and spending.

The *Sentinel* found two such complaints from 2024. One of those was closed out with no action taken and the other showed no movement or processing of it by the Fair Political Practices Commission's staff since it was filed on November 12, 2024, one week after the November 5, 2024 election in which Olson was victorious.

The greater balance of Together For Redlands' collective hostility is focused upon Candy Olson, but it has engaged in personal and sharp ad hominem attacks on Wilson as well. According to Together For Redlands, Wilson "doesn't think Nazi flags are hate symbols," she is a religious bigot who "is threatened by other people's religion," she "doesn't believe in gay marriage" and she is

doubly bigoted in that she “doesn’t want to follow state law on minority rights.”

The group’s animosity toward Olson runs deeper. She is, the group blithely claims, an out-and-out Nazi.

Olson crossed the line, they maintain, through what were either her own postings or repostings of photos, doctored images, cartoons and the like which, according to the group, reveal her intolerance, her infatuation with totalitarian regimes and put her authoritarian mindset on display for all the world to see.

“As for the characterization of Ms. Olson, in particular, community members are responding to her documented social media activity,” Together For Redlands stated. “She has posted (not liked, but posted) support for the KKK, Nazis, and memes that are anti-LGBTQ and promote violence. This is in addition to the more hateful memes she ‘liked.’”

Despite disavowing the use of bullying or intimidation tactics against officeholders and denying that it or its members had targeted the friends, families, or associates of elected officials, in its statement to the *Sentinel*, Together For Redlands acknowledged that one of Wilson’s and Olson’s supporters had gone to court to get a restraining order against Keeling, the group’s executive director, and Easley, who last year was a major Together For Redlands hanger-on and one of Keeling’s closest associates.

“The fact that you are referencing a restraining order that was not granted demonstrates we are not the ones attempting to mislead people,” Together For Redlands stated.

Keeling conveyed to the *Sentinel* that particular contretemps involved not hers but Easley’s animus toward the woman who sought the restraining order and that at this point she wanted to move herself and Together For Redlands beyond that chapter.

“Look, what that woman [who sought the restraining order] was portraying... I didn’t want to know her. I didn’t wish to know her. I don’t want to be involved. I want nothing to do with Amber, either. I have no relationship with Amber Easley anymore.”

The *Sentinel*’s email to Easley in an effort to get her version of events went unreturned.

Keeling said that a narrative which casts Olson, Wilson and Rendler as the virtuous trio while castigating those who oppose them as the embodiment of evil does not reflect reality. Nor did she and the rest of the progressive forces in Redlands cast the first stone, she maintained.

At this point, according to Keeling, Together For Redlands and the other liberals in town are merely replicating the tactics that Olson engaged in before she was elected and which succeeded in bringing her into office.

“Look at what Candy Olson put the former [liberal/progressive] board members through over the last three or four years,” Keeling said. “They were doxed and couldn’t turn around without her coming after them.”

-Mark Gutglueck

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