

# OE unveils podcast

The Oconee Enterprise can now be found on all major podcast applications. The Enterprise has launched The Main Street Minute, a podcast designed to preview the weekly edition of The Oconee Enterprise by highlighting business stories, updates on local sports, government news, lifestyles columns, local events and more.

The Enterprise realizes that life is busy, which is why The Main Street Minute is designed to be heard in less time than it

takes you to drive from one end of Main Street to the next. Whether you are in Watkinsville or Bogart, Bishop or Farmington, North High Shoals or Eastville, this Minute is for you.

Join us daily for a quick update on what is happening in your neighborhood, including reminders of meetings and local activities. If you're interested in listening, but not sure how to access podcasts, reach out to Amanda Prochaska at [Amanda@OconeeEnterprise.com](mailto:Amanda@OconeeEnterprise.com)

## OUR OPINIONS

# Sunshine law tribunal needed

It was quite a shock for us to come early to a North High Shoals meeting this week and discover the council was already meeting, and the doors were locked. Unbeknownst to us, the town put up signs at Town Hall over the weekend stating the need for an executive session. But that did not meet the Georgia code for Open Meetings, which requires notifying the legal organ in advance. In short, the meeting was not properly advertised to the public, according to Georgia's Sunshine laws.

Sunshine laws are laws, not suggestions, former State Rep. Bob Smith said. Smith has written a legislative proposal called the "H.O.T. Act," which stands for "Honesty. Open. Transparent."

As part of the proposed H.O.T. Act, the governor would nominate five people to a Tribunal Board. Those members shall be confirmed by a majority of the Georgia Senate. Members should have staggered terms. A majority of the board members shall then appoint a chief judge of the tribunal for a term of five years. The tribunal shall receive, and review alleged open records/open meetings violations as sent by private

citizens, elected officials and other parties that need to be heard for violations.

Should a party disagree with the decision of the tribunal judge, the party may file further action in state courts. And should a statewide grand jury be created by an act of the Georgia General Assembly, then the party may then file action in such venue.

At present, the office of the Georgia Attorney General reviews open records and meeting complaints. But a tribunal would make their review process a more democratic process and could help with any backlog that the Attorney General's office has.

"Honest, open and transparent government is imperative," said Smith. "Open records and open meetings violations need attention in the State of Georgia now."

It would also be a step in the right direction for state legislators to no longer exclude themselves from Georgia's Sunshine laws. "What's the harm in more transparency?" is a question we too often have to ask our elected leaders.

*Editorials represent the position of The Oconee Enterprise.*

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# Questions asked of political parties

Something fairly historic in Oconee politics occurred this month—a political party disavowed candidates who qualified under that party's label.

Similarly to how the national Democratic Party has disowned Robert Kennedy Jr. or even how the Republican Party has ostracized Liz Cheney, the Oconee County Democratic Party has made a declaration that three candidates for local office do not represent their values.

Some of these candidates have spoken out against LGBTQ and gender-focused books being shelved within the children or young adult sections of the Oconee County Library.

The Oconee Democratic Party believes that access to all literature is a First Amendment right, that objecting to the content of books is a subjective process and that it's up to parents to monitor what their children read.

But just as someone can believe Donald Trump incited a riot and still declare himself or herself a Republican, it's not unfathomable that someone could call himself or herself a Democrat and take a more conservative stance on this particular issue.

That said, leaders of both political parties in Oconee can easily look up candidates' voting records (how frequently someone has voted and whether that person has taken a Democratic or Republican ballot in a Primary). And some of the Democratic candidates in this election have a history of voting Republican.

So, what's going on here? Have these candidates switched parties? Are they proving some kind of point? Is this a social experiment? Do they just want to stay in the race until November, rather than risk getting "Primaried out"?

As we interview each candidate, we are asking why he or she is running under the political party label one chose. Candidates should be able to express, in their own words, the reasoning behind their decisions.

And while it's unfair for the Oconee County Democratic Party to automatically make these candidates persona non grata, we also have to

question a policy of the Georgia Republican Party.

Georgia code allows a party to ask for an allegiance oath. The state GOP has a rule that any candidate for elective office shall submit such an oath affirming his or her allegiance to the party. And that rule trickles down to the county level.

Here, the Oconee GOP qualified candidates for the May 21 Primary, and so candidates signed the oath.

All Republican candidates signed the oath and "no candidate expressing a desire to qualify as a Republican was turned away during the process," according to a statement from the Oconee GOP.

However, BOE candidate Joyce Reifsteck wrote to us with a cogent argument against the oath.

"We're seeking office for the purpose of serving the citizens of Oconee County, not for the purpose of serving the Republican Party or Democratic Party," said Reifsteck.

Although Reifsteck considers herself a conservative Republican, she acknowledges that if elected, she will serve constituents who identify as Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Green Party, Independent, etc.

And so while the school board race is partisan on the ballot, those

who serve make decisions that are non-partisan in nature.

"It's possible to embrace Republican and Democrat ideals at the same time," said Reifsteck. "It's possible to be a good public servant, elected or not, without being a servant to a political party. There are good things about both parties."

In his final address, George Washington warned against what he believed were the two greatest dangers to American prosperity: foreign wars and political parties.

In modern history, the late U.S. Sen. John McCain called on his colleagues to serve all citizens and not just their own party.

"I hope we can again rely on humility, on our need to cooperate, on our dependence on each other to learn how to trust each other again and by so doing better, serve the people who elected us," he said in 2017. "Stop listening to the bombastic loudmouths on the radio and television and the internet. To hell with them. They don't want anything done for the public good. Our incapacity is their livelihood."

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