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Cruz runs against Saxon

By [Caitlin Farmer](#) | March 27, 2024 | 0



Retired pathologist and 27-year Oconee County resident Victoria Cruz qualified as a Republican candidate for Oconee County Board of Commissioners Post 5. She will face incumbent Mark Saxon on the May 21 Republican Primary ballot. There is no Democratic challenger, so the winner of the Primary will be the only name on the Nov. 5 General Election ballot.

Cruz said some of the issues important to her are safety, election confidence, increased civic engagement, transparency, communication and food security.

Cruz said she decided to run because she wanted to see a change, and change doesn't happen without civic engagement.

Cruz said she doesn't want to be defined as a Republican or Democrat, instead describing herself as a conservative on the right of the nation's ideology.

"We should be united about the things that matter to us, which are personal freedom, the ability to advance in life, to have a good standard of living, to be able to marry and have children and not have that labeled as bad for the environment," Cruz said.

Cruz grew up surrounded by dairy farms and factories in the small town of Norwich, New York, where her six siblings still live. She received a degree in biology with a concentration in anatomy and physiology from Cornell University.

Cruz said her father was also a doctor and immigrated to the United States around 1950 after graduating from the University of the Philippines College of Medicine, where she completed medical school 30 years after him.

Cruz said she graduated second in her class and would've stayed in the Philippines for her residency but non-citizens weren't allowed to take advanced training or enter a residency, so she returned to the U.S. and went to Syracuse, New York.

She worked as a pathologist at two hospitals in Fort Myers, Florida, where she lived for 10 years before moving to Oconee County with her husband, Stephen Aleshire, who got a job at Piedmont Athens Regional Hospital. (Aleshire is running for the Oconee Board of Education Post 5).

Cruz focused on clinical pathology and studied blood cells, blood types and how blood can be used therapeutically for immunity problems or bone marrow transplants.

Cruz, a mother of two, said she intended to work in pathology for many years but when her father passed away while her children were young, she decided to retire in 1994 when she realized she didn't get a chance to know her father because he constantly worked.

"I want my kids to know us because, in the end, that's the most important thing, that you spend time with your kids," Cruz said.

After retiring, Cruz volunteered at her children's schools and worked with Girl Scouts of the USA.

Since 2021, Cruz said her time's been occupied by election integrity efforts in Georgia.

Cruz said she feels electronic voting isn't secure, but paper ballots hand-marked and hand-counted by county citizens are secure.

"I want people to have confidence in their elections again," she said.

Cruz said she likes the BOC town halls and wants people to be more civically engaged while feeling free to speak their minds. BOC meetings are only full when there's a zoning issue, she noted.

"People realize that government affects them when it's in their backyard, and then they get up and they organize and they try to defeat that," Cruz said. "But that's a single focus, that's a single issue."

An idea to increase engagement Cruz said was to host a picnic or outside event for families to speak with the BOC.

Cruz said she's worried about the growth of the county and how money is spent, adding that she believes the government should hide nothing from taxpayers.

"I think that our commission could be more transparent," Cruz said. "That's certainly what I would like to do. I like to dig into the weeds and find all the problems."

Cruz expressed concerns over future food security in the U.S. due to food companies owned by people tied to other countries and suggested the county look into usable farmland for educational opportunities.

“I think the county should have a program and land set up for where people can learn how to garden,” Cruz said. “It’s not an easy thing.”

Cruz shared her safety concerns in terms of border security and cited the February murder of Laken Riley on the University of Georgia campus.

Cruz noted that the murder defendant had come into this country illegally.

Cruz expressed support for term limits and said they bring new people into public office.

If elected, Cruz said she’d impose term limits on herself and if allowed, would refuse to be paid.

Cruz said she thinks drain and road maintenance are important but questioned if infrastructure additions would encourage growth, adding that she doesn’t want Oconee County to become a suburb of Atlanta.

“I don’t like the way the country’s going, and I think we could do more locally to help Oconee weather whatever’s coming. And it’s not by building more storage facilities,” Cruz said. “It’s not by having flyovers. It’s not by having roundabouts. I mean, maybe that’s important, but I think in the future, we’re going to need something more than that.”

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