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**Capitol View**

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**Rich Republicans Funding Fight Against RINOs**

Leave it to the Republicans to pick on their own. Leave it to the short-timer Nebraska Governor to lead the charge.

Yes folks, Governor Pete Ricketts is the first and only funder, so far, of a political action committee that is seeking to block the election of a term-limited Republican state senator seeking election as a University of Nebraska Regent. The state Accountability and Disclosure Commission said Ricketts has given $314,000 to the Nebraska Future Action Fund.

That group has spent about $51,000 to campaign against outgoing State Sen. Matt Williams of Gothenburg who is seeking a Regent’s seat. All because, according to Ricketts or somebody, Williams is a RINO – Republican In Name Only. Political dictionaries define that as a disparaging term that refers to a Republican candidate whose political views are seen as insufficiently conforming to the party line.

The phrase, without the acronym, dates back to President Theodore Roosevelt who in 1912 left the Grand Old Party to start the Progressive Party. Political observers say it surfaced again, with the RINO label, in an article in the New Hampshire Union Leader in the 1990s.

We have no idea who determines the party line or what criteria are used to determine when someone is no longer following it. I have a pretty strong sense that in Ricketts’ case it’s based on a grudge linked to some vote that didn’t go his way. In all fairness, Williams isn’t the first to face the wrath of Ricketts’ considerable wealth.

The PAC itself is shrouded in some mystery. No website yet, no spokesperson to comment. Nothing from Ricketts himself. Both Williams and his opponent Kathy Wilmot, also a Republican, said they knew nothing about the PAC’s goals. It has spent money on radio attack ads calling Williams a “liberal RINO.” Ricketts directly donated $10,000 to Wilmot’s campaign.

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She also counts former Governor Kay Orr and failed gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster as supporters in the nonpartisan race.

Williams recently told media that his history in the Nebraska Legislature proves he has supported conservative policies like tax relief, abortion restrictions and increasing gun access. “And those are the real facts,” he said. He also believes his votes to override Ricketts’ vetoes on bills: to raise the gas tax for highway construction; repealing the death penalty; and granting driver’s and professional licenses to DACA recipients are what got him in trouble with Ricketts.

I’ve said this before, it is NOT illegal for the Ricketts’ family to use their own money as they see fit. I do have to ask if the Governor is governing or trying to buy influence and control outcomes.

Earlier this year, Ricketts contributed nearly $1.28 million to Conservative Nebraska, a PAC that ran advertisements opposing Herbster and Sen. Brett Lindstrom — two Republican candidates for governor who challenged Ricketts’ preferred candidate, and the eventual winner of the primary, Jim Pillen.

But he’s not the only wealthy Nebraska political figure exerting financial force on state politics.  Herbster formed Nebraska First PAC in August to oppose secret ballot voting to determine leadership roles in the Nebraska Legislature, and support permit free carry of concealed firearms.

The Ricketts family was the primary door behind efforts to get a voter ID bill on the November ballot. Ricketts was also the major donor on the ballot effort a few years ago to get the death penalty reinstated. Ironically, he was also a major proponent of the “Choose Life” license plates. I guess that means some life.

On top of everything else, the disturbing thing in all this is the use of this money for negative attack advertising. While it’s allowed under state law, it shouldn’t stop people from doing their own research.

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Let’s hope that we can somehow break this cycle of rich, vindictive governors. It does nothing good for democracy.

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