

Not Satire: 'RINO Convention' Days Away - Guest List is a Who's Who of Rabid Trump-Haters

By C. Douglas Golden
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There's no shortage of conventions where attendees put on costumes and pretend to be someone else. There are "Star Trek" conventions where people dress as Spock, comic book conventions where you could see Spiderman or Wonder Woman, or anime conventions where the costume of choice is Sailor Moon.

In that vein, we bring you Principles First, a convention where rabid NeverTrumpers play dress-up as actual conservatives.

According to [The Hill](#), Principles First is intended as a kind of RINO counter-programming for the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, with both set to take place this weekend. We're not talking satire here: Principles First is not only a real thing, it's being held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

Its most prominent speakers are GOP Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois — the only two Republican members invited to participate in the Democrat-run Jan. 6 committee in the House of Representatives by Nancy Pelosi. We've been chronicling the damage both of them have done by adding a patina of legitimacy to the Democrats' witch hunt here at The Western Journal, and we'll continue bringing people the truth about these "Republicans." You can help us by [subscribing](#).

On Principles First's [website](#), it describes the Feb. 26-27 convention in Washington as being "focused on discussing and advancing a more principled politics in the United States.

"We look forward to bringing together conservative and independent speakers, thought leaders, and grassroots activists for two days of panels, speeches, networking, and substantive discussion about the meaning of conservatism today and the future of our movement," the description reads.

Scroll down, however, and the first event partner you see is The Bulwark — the grift-tastic RINO outlet founded by two of the NeverTrump movement's chief establishment architects, Bill Kristol and Charlie Sykes. (Both are featured speakers.)

In addition to Cheney and Kinzinger, we also have an appearance from Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, whose fight with Trump over certifying the vote in Georgia drew national attention. Georgia Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan will also make an appearance.

Those are the only sitting politicians. Minor-league former office-holders who've found varying degrees of post-electoral fame by railing against Trump, however, will also be speaking.

There's Joe Walsh, the former Illinois Republican who served one term in the House of Representatives. After his cup of coffee in office, he became a controversial conservative radio host. Then decided he didn't like Donald Trump, so he mounted a quixotic run against the sitting president in the 2020 Republican primaries.

Despite raising an infinitesimal amount of money, this challenge was taken seriously enough by the media that they started taking Joe Walsh's prior statements seriously — including, according to Axios, claims that Barack Obama was a Muslim and “traitor.”

He spent a decent chunk of the campaign apologizing for his past — telling BuzzFeed News that he wasn't a racist, “but certainly I've said some racist things” — got almost no support and pulled out after receiving less than 1.1 percent of the vote against Trump in Iowa. In withdrawing, he said the GOP was “not a party, it's a cult.”

So yeah, if you want to engage in a “substantive discussion about the meaning of conservatism today and the future of our movement” involving that guy, Principles First has you covered. Sure beats CPAC, right?

We also have Denver Riggleman — who, despite the name, was a House rep from Virginia. He also served one term in Congress from 2019 to 2021. He now maintains a Twitter feed in which he tells people about what music he's listening to (he's basic enough that he considers “Dream On” by Aerosmith “too damn cool”), his farm life and, of course, how the GOP is a vile hive of treacheries all connected to Trump:

If you want to discuss “Conspiracy LLC” — which I'm also guessing has some part in that big ol' “substantive discussion” about the conservative movement — Mr. Riggleman will be there. Bring a few Aerosmith tapes and a boombox and I'm sure he'll sit down to jam with you.

There's also Alexander Vindman, the former National Security Council official, whose whistleblower report on then-President Trump's phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky led to Trump's first impeachment. Tom Nichols, the emphatic-airquotes “conservative” in residence at The Atlantic, is featured. So is Capitol Police Office Harry Dunn, who testified before the Jan. 6 committee.

Throw in a few writers from libertarian Reason Magazine and a few more libertarians from the Cato Institute, along with a veritable smorgasbord of other speakers best known to their family and friends, and you have what Republican attorney Heath Mayo — founder of Principles First for America, which is hosting the summit — says will “certainly be counter-programming of CPAC.”

“We want to come together in a visual show of support for people who have taken stands for ideas when it hasn’t been comfortable,” Mayo told CBS News. “You don’t see those folks, yet, in rooms that are energized. But I think the energy is there. We’ll see how many folks show up.”

Those people might be attending a convention where there are more set to speak than there are in the audience. CPAC is in Orlando, Florida this year, so perhaps Principles First will get a few stragglers who can’t make it to the Sunshine State.

However, the lineup at CPAC includes Sens. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, Mike Braun of Indiana, Ted Cruz of Texas, Bill Hagerty of Tennessee, James Lankford of Oklahoma and Rick Scott of Florida. You also have Reps. Lauren Boebert and Ken Buck of Colorado, Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina, Ronny Jackson of Texas and Jim Jordan of Ohio. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis will be there, along with radio hosts Mark Levin and Glenn Beck, and Ultimate Fighting Championship legend Tito Ortiz.

Oh, and then there’s Donald Trump himself.

So, no, the Principles First “counterprogramming” doesn’t look like it’s all that appealing unless you’re one of the people on the rostrum. On the plus side, though, if you’re the kind of conventioner who misses dressing up as Han Solo for ComicCon but you’re too old for that kind of ridiculousness, Principles First *will* let you discreetly play-act as a real conservative for a weekend at an event where a bunch of anti-Trump hand-wringers parrot Democrat talking points. There’s that, I guess.