

June 14, 2007

Letter to the Editor of the *Tallahassee Democrat*:

In a June 13 Letter to the Editor, Landon Ross raises some questions about The James Madison Institute. He criticizes our use of the word “Institute” and our being described as “nonpartisan” rather than “conservative.” We’d like to address those concerns.

First, “Institute” is an important part of our name and our identity. Ever since our founding by Dr. J. Stanley Marshall in 1987, our primary purpose has been to conduct independent research and to disseminate the findings – much as is done at the national level by organizations such as *The Cato Institute* and *The Institute for Justice*.

Second, we are truly a non-partisan organization. As even Mr. Ross concedes, we don’t endorse political candidates, we don’t make campaign contributions, and we don’t lobby for or against specific pieces of legislation.

Instead, we advocate on behalf of the free-market principles of limited government, individual liberty, and personal responsibility. These are principles that enjoy broad support among Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, and independents alike. They were eloquently expressed by our namesake, James Madison, widely admired as “the Father of the Constitution.”

As for our non-partisan nature, our Board of Directors and our senior staff both include ardent Democrats as well as dedicated Republicans. Moreover, our quarterly Journal has proudly published articles by Bob Graham, Sandy D’Alemberte, Buddy Mackay, and former Miami Herald publisher David Lawrence, Jr. – all of whom, it’s fair to say, are not widely regarded as conservatives.

Moreover, in this era of polarized politics, simplistic terms such as “liberal” and “conservative” carry a lot of baggage. Many readers might assume, for instance, that an organization the media tag as “conservative” is defined by its positions on “wedge issues” such as abortion, gay rights, immigration, and guns.

Although JMI’s members may have their personal views on those kinds of issues, as an organization we focus on applying our free-market principles to the economy and to related issues such as education, energy, and health care, which have an impact on our economy, not those “wedge issues.”

We very much appreciate the fact that *The Democrat*’s “Local Conversation” welcomes contributions from JMI and many others – even our critics -- reflecting a wide spectrum of viewpoints. That’s what a community’s “conversation” should be about: ideas, not labels.

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