

AN EDUCATIONAL UPDATE FROM  
THE SOUTHEAST LAW INSTITUTE™, INC.

**To:** SLI Supporters  
**Date:** March 2016  
**From:** A. Eric Johnston  
**Re:** Where Have All the Conservatives Gone?

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It seems that American voters have lost the ability to choose a President to lead America in these perilous times. It also seems that there may not be a leader with qualifications to do so. Or, is it a question of both? And what about the Alabama Legislature, is it conservative?

We recently heard it said that the reason so many potential Democrat voters were supporting Bernie Sanders is that because they were not old enough to remember a world with communism and socialism. They do not understand the meaning of the terms. More importantly, they do not understand the reality of the burdens that these systems of government put on its citizens. They do not understand the destruction of constitutional rights and liberties. They seem to believe that the government is able to create utopia and everyone lives happily ever after. I believe whoever made this observation of the ignorance of youth is probably correct.

By the same reasoning, I believe Republicans have also lost their way. We have ubiquitous public debates on television. It seems that the Republicans do it more, but perhaps it is because there are more candidates that make it seem that way. Nevertheless, anytime you tune in to one of the Republican debates, you hear the same superficial debate with each candidate claiming to be more conservative than the other. The only thing that seems to change is that, depending on polls, you never know who will be attacking the other.

How many of us now remember what a conservative is? The Wall Street Journal recently ran an editorial about the rise and intelligence of the conservatism of William F. Buckley. The editorial explained how he articulated the foundation of a movement which produced people like Ronald Reagan, Bill Bennett, Everett Koop, and others who defined the values of what we have until today called “conservatism.” Until Buckley, conservatism was not really a political philosophy. What conservatives truly believe, according to Buckley, would be limited government, a strong military, protection of individual constitutional rights of religion, speech, and protection of human life. We saw during the 1960s and into the 1990s political and legal struggles over these issues and during the Ronald Reagan years, America became a shining city on a hill. However, in the years that followed, that shining light dimmed.

Now we see Republican presidential candidates claiming to be conservative, but in reality wearing only the label. The content of their messages bear little identity with conservative values and they produce little more than loud screeching noise of how conservative they are and how great they will make America. Unfortunately, many citizens mistake this for substance. They support perception and not reality, probably due in most part to their own lack of education of the definition of a conservative.

But it is not only presidential contenders who fail this test. We can look right here at home to a Republican led Alabama legislature who campaigned as conservatives, yet give little attention to a conservative agenda. To be sure, there are a number of conservatives in the legislature, but as a body, it does not meet the threshold.

When discussing a religious freedom bill last week, one senator said, “You would think passing a religious freedom protection bill would not be an issue in this legislature.” Another person observed that these Republicans claim to be Christians, but do not behave as such – don’t they know that God knows what they are doing? On that very day it reminded me of what I had read in the Book of Jonah, when Jonah tried to escape God by taking a ship to Tarshish. Did Jonah not realize that God knew what he was doing?

So, we have either raucous presidential candidates or a quiet Alabama legislature, all of whom pretend to be conservative, but cannot or will not provide us with the leadership America and Alabama needs. Where is W.F.B. when you need him?

Cordially,

A. Eric Johnston