

Arizona county recorder candidate may not be the MAGA minion that he claims

Opinion: Justin Heap, MAGA's candidate to knock off Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer, talks a lot about the need for transparency. Yet he's the most artful dodger in the race.



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Justin Heap, one of the MAGA Republicans hoping to take control of Maricopa County, has pledged to bring more transparency and honesty to Arizona's elections if only you will vote for him on July 30.

"I'm running for Recorder to restore honesty, transparency & integrity in our elections," he said, in announcing his candidacy in February.

Perhaps then he could begin with his own background?

By explaining why he lied about his vote in the 2016 presidential primary.

And why he changed his voter registration to independent shortly after Donald Trump was elected.

About how he came this year to be such an enthusiastic supporter of the man he defended last year with this high praise:

"Trump is a serial philanderer and womanizer but it's pretty clear from his record, he likes adult women."

Mr. Transparency remains an enigma



Republican county recorder candidate Justin Heap gives his opening statement during a Citizens Clean Elections debate at BitFire Studios in Phoenix on Monday, June 24, 2024. *Michael Chow/The Republic*

And I'd really like to know whether Heap is truly a Make American Great Again guy or whether he just plays one on the campaign trail hoping the conspiracy crowd can catapult him into office.

I'd ask, but Mr. Transparency didn't reply to a request for comment.

Heap is a first-term lawmaker, selected by Sen. Jake Hoffman to try to knock off Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer in the July 30 primary.

In MAGA circles, Richer is considered the Beelzebub of county government — the devil who denied the 2020 was stolen and then, with backup from his dark angels on the (GOP-run) Board of Supervisors, denied Kari Lake her due in 2022.

Never mind the lack of any credible evidence or really, any explanation for why the Republicans who run the county would want to rig an election for a Democrat to become governor.

Regardless, the hard right is hoping to seize all key county posts this year and No. 1 on their hit list is Richer.

Justin Heap has some MAGA tendencies

During a debate this week, two of the three Republican candidates for county recorder were crystal clear when asked whether the 2020 and 2022 elections were stolen.

Richer insisted they weren't. Don Hiatt insisted they were.

Heap dodged the question.

Yet he's a member of Hoffman's hard right Arizona Freedom Caucus, and he's supported by many of the state's most prominent election deniers, including Lake.

He's one of 13 House Republicans who voted to support one of the state's most ardent election deniers, ex-Rep. Liz Harris, when she was expelled last year for her part in a crazy scheme to publicly accuse Gov. Katie Hobbs and others of secretly working for a Mexican drug cartel.

He's voted for bills that are the Holy Grail of the MAGA movement, including proposals to require the hand counting of ballots and to end the state's early voting program.

He replied "LOL" when a MAGA supporter posted a GIF mocking Republican Supervisor Bill Gates. This, after Gates' announcement that he'd been diagnosed with PTSD following three years of threats to his family from the election denial crowd.

He asked a lobbyist why they hadn't donated

Heap did have one brief, shining moment during his two years in the Legislature. Earlier this year, he refused to go along with a ridiculous bill to award the state's 11 electoral votes to Trump now — before voters even go to the polls.

"Are you asking us just to give Donald Trump the electors without having a vote?" Heap asked Rep. Rachel Jones, his fellow Freedom Caucus member who sponsored the bill.

But he's also the legislator who, upon taking office in 2023, emailed a lobbyist who wanted a meeting to discuss deregulation issues in Arizona. Heap's response was to ask why her firm hadn't donated to his 2022 campaign.

“I need to prioritize which meetings I can take,” Heap wrote in the email obtained by The Washington Post. “May I ask you, Did Consortium [sic] Consulting donate to my campaign fund? And if not, why did you (or your clients) decide not to do so?”

The lobbyist told 12 News the meeting never happened.

So, yeah, Heap seems a totally logical choice to deliver “election integrity.”

Why did Heap vote for Cruz, not Trump?

But first, he should explain a few things:

For example, Heap says he voted for Ted Cruz in the 2016 presidential preference election.

“It is true that in the 2016 Presidential Preference Election I did not vote for Donald J. Trump,” he wrote in a June 4 social media post, answering critics who questioned his loyalty to Trump.

Hard right has a laughable plan:To destroy Stephen Richer

“Like many lifelong Constitutional Conservatives, I was unsure if his policies would match his rhetoric, which led me to cast my vote for someone who, at the time, had an impeccable conservative track record in Congress — Senator Ted Cruz.”

But county records obtained by Dillon Rosenblatt, who runs a blog focused on public records, indicate Heap didn't vote at all in 2016 presidential preference election.

Those same records show he changed his registration from Republican to independent in 2017. He then reregistered as a Republican in 2021, just in time to run for the Arizona House from Mesa in 2022.

Why did he say he wasn't a MAGA supporter?

In 2023, Heap said in several now-deleted social media posts that he's not a part of the MAGA movement and, in fact, wasn't a Trump supporter.

“I'm not a MAGA supporter,” he flatly wrote in May 2023.

“Actually cult rehabilitation is a well studied & documented field of psychology,” he replied that same day in a separate post. “But like I said, I’m not a Trump supporter. So your accusations are meaningless.”

“I’m not MAGA,” he wrote in August 2023. “I didn’t vote for Trump the first time and I hoped he would not run again because I believe he is too polarizing.”

Earlier this month, Heap clarified that he was referring to the presidential primary when he said he didn’t vote for Trump the first time.

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/laurieroberts/2024/06/26/justin-heap-maga-recorder-race/74221944007/>