

POLITICO

S.C. GOP unites with tea party

By: **Andy Barr**

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The South Carolina Republican Party announced Monday that it's uniting with tea party groups in the state to share resources, coordinate messaging and push the GOP in a more conservative direction.

The points of contact between the state party establishment and the grass-roots will be the Greenville County Republican Party — one of the most conservative wings of the state party — and the Upstate Coalition of Conservative Organizations, an umbrella structure of state tea party groups.

The agreement, as announced by South Carolina Republicans, is designed to serve four goals: increase precinct involvement, improve communication between the state party and grass-roots groups, create liaisons between the state party and the various tea party organizations and to work "closely to make the Republican Party more conservative."

State Republican Party Chairwoman Karen Floyd told POLITICO that the arrangement came at the suggestion of a local activist who works with both the state party and local tea party groups.

"This is not something the state party by edict pushed down," Floyd said. "This is something the grass-roots pushed up with an understanding that we are stronger together than apart."

Floyd said that working with the groups accomplishes her goals of "growing the Republican Party, electing conservative Republicans and growing the strength of the party," though she was careful in describing what the party intends to do in working with the tea parties to elect more conservative members.

"What we mean by that is being ideologically in step with our platform of creating a small government and advancing individual liberty," she said, insisting that partnering with the tea parties would not block support for more moderate candidates.

"The Republican Party gets behind whoever gets out of the primary," Floyd said. "This is not a sanctioning, or vetting by the Republican Party."

Harry Kibler, a spokesman for the Upstate Coalition of Conservative Organizations, said, "We are all interested in the same goal — a more conservative South Carolina."

"While we may not always agree on how to meet that goal, we think this agreement is a start," he added. "Having our groups work together will be of great benefit to the Republican Party and the state of South Carolina."

The tea party movement is strong in South Carolina, where dozens of groups have hosted well-attended rallies. Before admitting to an extramarital affair that crippled his political career, South Carolina GOP Gov. Mark Sanford was one of the movement's darlings and attended some of the state's tax day protests.

National Republicans have tried repeatedly to capture the energy of the grass-roots movement but, so far, with little success.

Republican National Chairman Michael Steele has widely praised the tea party movement, saying that if he weren't chairman, he'd be a tea party organizer.

In December, Steele teamed up with former House Majority Leader Dick Armey, whose FreedomWorks group has organized hundreds of anti-tax rallies in a push to scuttle President Barack Obama's proposed health care overhaul. The Republican National Committee also helped organize a Capitol Hill tea party rally.

The Republican Governors Association has tried to capture the grass-roots energy as well, organizing a conference call with governors and tea party activists during the summer.

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