

Political Styles in Orange Beach

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Political styles are unlikely heroes.

Orange Beach's Mayor Tony Kennon is serving his third term, occupying the office longer than any other political leader since the town was incorporated in 1984. We can look at his past actions and today's legislative agenda, perhaps seeing where on the political totem his ideology has been, and where his political style is leading the City of Orange Beach.

Mayor Kennon's political style is syncretic or a fusion of hard-knocks learned and commander-in-business beliefs, having developed his craft over time, making it hard for residents to inject innovative and untried ideas, putting forward new ways of doing things, "Not once but twice, my character was attacked [in Council Chambers] because I refuse to just go with the flow [bend the knee]," said Joe Emerson (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/155706324781200/permalink/757157607969399/>).

As the fifth mayor since incorporation in 1984, Mayor Kennon likes consensus in his City Council. A 6-0 vote is the usual result, perhaps 99% of the time over the last two years. Absolute agreement on every issue brought to the floor is a signature of his political style.

It aggravates Mayor Kennon when residents dissent. For example the proposed Flyover Bridge in Orange Beach two miles west of the Foley Beach Express, elicited this response from him on Facebook, "i have been following with much interest the comments on this site [Facebook]. my suggestion is that everyone who is in disagreement with this bridge, in favor of the bridge, in favor of the road thru the park , those who r against the road thru the park and everyone who wishes to blow up the bridges so no one else can make it across the canal now that u have ur piece of the island, load up and come to a council meeting so that u can get the facts, the real truth and stop being educated into further ignorance by following this site. i welcome all of u. in the end we may agree to disagree but at least u have the true facts to base ur decision on. let me know of a date and i will make sure we accommodate the request," (End The #Bridge2Nowhere, June 18, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/155706324781200/members/>).

Some residents do go to City Hall, voicing their dissenting opinions, but have a humbling experience in the Council Chambers, as reported by Joe Emerson, founder of the Facebook Group: End The #Bridge2Nowhere (Flyover Bridge), "I would like to say that I took Mayor Kennon's advice and went to 2 City Council meetings 'to get the facts' [about the flyover bridge]. Not once, but twice I was denied access to public information about the project (after being assured that my request for the white papers was approved). Not once but twice, I left the Orange Beach City Council Chambers with more incentive to get to the

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bottom of this [flyover bridge funding],”
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/155706324781200/permalink/757157607969399/>).

Winning over detractors is what Mayor Kennon likes to do using various tactics, but in the case of Joe Emerson the strong arm failed, and Mayor Kennon lost the advantage of a negotiated compromise. This inability to nail down negotiations also carried over to losing CenturyLink’s fiber-to-the-home initiative (<http://altoday.com/archives/26906-rauf-bolden-fiber-optic-internet-to-the-home-in-orange-beach>), and to losing out on the \$192,416,759 U.S. Treasury approved Alabama multiyear implementation plan for Gulf Coast recovery settlement (BP money). Orange Beach’s projects failed to gain any traction, not even for a boat launch on the south side of the island, verified by looking at this approved project list (<http://altoday.com/archives/27619-u-s-treasury-approves-alabamas-multiyear-implementation-plan-for-gulf-coast-recovery>).

Not all of Mayor Kennon’s plans focus on the opposition, or on lost opportunities. He is actively moving forward, building consensus with parents whose children will attend the proposed Baldwin County Middle School/High School on Canal Road in 2020. The City of Orange Beach is contributing at least eight million dollars to the school, possibly more in the future. The school opening was delayed for one year from 2019 to 2020, citing unrealistic construction bids as the reason, forcing students into portables while the school is under construction (<http://altoday.com/archives/27580-rauf-bolden-school-delay-in-orange-beach-begs-question-should-taxes-be-on-the-table>).

“The current ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders will stay at Gulf Shores [in 2019],” Kennon said. “They will finish out there. The kids who are Gulf Shores next year will finish at Gulf Shores. The kids who are at the middle school [Gulf Shores seventh and eighth graders] from Orange Beach will be here [Orange Beach] next year [in portables for 2019],” according to a report by John Mullen in The Lagniappe (<https://lagniappemobile.com/hurricane-other-factors-combine-to-delay-orange-beach-school/>).

Infrastructure spending is a cornerstone of conservative ideology, and Mayor Kennon understands that building the school and Wolf Bay Bridge will create jobs in the community, providing scholastic excellence for the children, enticing more condo developments, while infusing lots of extra cash into the local economy.

“He [Mayor Kennon] is doing a good job,” said Roy Scott an eight-year resident and building contractor in Orange Beach.

Mayor Kennon’s innovative skills work from the top down. The City of Orange Beach does not have a citizen-suggestion format or citizens’ advisory committee, allowing constituents a formal process through a committee, submitting vetted suggestions to the City Council. An example is building a Trauma Center (<http://altoday.com/archives/26401-rauf-bolden-we-need-a-trauma-center-in-orange-beach>), or improving drainage in Bear Point (<http://altoday.com/archives/27111-rauf-bolden-flood-drainage-in-orange-beach>).

There is also no method for petitioning the Council, essentially asking for a hearing against any project Mayor Kennon has his heart set on, like backing the Flyover Bridge west of the Foley Beach Express (<http://altoday.com/archives/27483-rauf-bolden-bridge2nowhere-in-orange-beach>). Mayor Kennon is the undisputed face of the city, controlling all legislative proposals, and budgets from inception to passage, making it

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difficult for the ordinary citizen to submit a formal objection without the expense of going to law.

Offering a Referendum to voters would heighten transparency before allocating \$60 million of taxpayer funds, building the mile and a half long Wolf Bay Bridge from Docs to the North Shore, but the Referendum will never happen.

Perhaps a bad taste still lingers in Mayor Kennon's mouth from the 2014 Referendum, trying to establish an independent school system. The mandate was defeated by a wide margin, according to a report by Marc D. Anderson in [AL.com](https://www.al.com/news/mobile/index.ssf/2014/09/orange_beach_referendum_result.html) (https://www.al.com/news/mobile/index.ssf/2014/09/orange_beach_referendum_result.html). In that vote Mayor Kennon trusted the constituents to reaffirm his vision, but they let him down, so he will never ask them again.

Some people say Mayor Kennon sees the city's general fund as his own treasury, legislating his vision as the guiding light for City Council's decisions, seeing his path as a calling. He has often said, just give me the keys to the castle and don't ask too many questions. Conservative values, and absolute loyalty from City Council and City Staff, is Mayor Tony Kennon's governing style.

ENDS.