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IN WASHINGTON, DC

On the heels of the Indian American Leadership Initiative – a Democratic organization which identifies and supports Indian American candidates for political office – Indian American Republicans have also established a political action committee, the Republican Indian Committee.

Dilip Paliath, national spokesman and one of the founding members of RIC, which has filed its incorporation papers in the state of Virginia, told *India Abroad*, “Our rationale for forming the RIC is to coordinate the fundraising efforts of Indian-American Republicans, so that we speak with a unified voice.”

Paliath, the highest-ranking Indian American in the Maryland administration (chief counsel to the then governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr, from 2003 to 2006), said, “Our purpose is to elect Republicans who believe in limited government and who recognize that businesses create jobs. We will also support candidates who understand that when the

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world’s oldest democracy – the United States of America – and the world’s largest democracy – India – cooperate and collaborate, US security interests will be advanced.”

Paliath said the RIC would have “state chapters across the country and we plan to announce the chairmen of those state chapters soon.”

He said the Virginia chapter had already elected Dr Kamlesh Dave, a cardiologist from Richmond, as its chairman; Puneet Ahluwalia, an entrepreneur, is its president.

Paliath said one of RIC’s priorities would be to support Indian-American Republican candidates who run for political office. “We have not limited RIC’s involvement to a particular level, but we are aware of the 2010 Congressional elections,” he said, adding that it expected to be active on the federal level, and in states where it establishes chapters.

Ahluwalia said, “Government does not create jobs, businesses do. So, we hope to unite Indian American business leaders as one voice in support of lower taxes, streamlined regulation, and accelerated exports.”

Paliath said the RIC would not compete with the more than decade-old Indian American Republican Council but complement it. He said the IARC is a 501 c3 non-profit organization under the Internal Revenue Service Code, while the RIC is a 527 organization, which can raise funds for political activities and lobbying.

The IARC was founded by Republican party stalwart Dr Raghavendra Vijayanagar, who held the helm for nearly a decade before the reins were handed to the second generation last year, with Dino Teppara, former chief of staff to Congressman Joe Wilson, the South Carolina Republican, taking over its stewardship. Teppara had support from other second-generation Indian-American Republicans such as

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Suhail Khan and Ajay Kuntamukkala, who both served in the George W Bush administration.

He explained that the RIC came to be formed by "just a realization that now's an opportune time to be involved. A lot of folks we've been talking to have been conservatives and they haven't been hurt by the economy. So they still have disposable income that they are willing to put into the political process,"

Paliath said, adding that the RIC was trying to help in fundraising.

Acknowledging that the RIC would support people like South Carolina legislators Nikki Randhawa Haley, who is seeking the GOP nomination for state governor, Paliath said the RIC would not restrict itself to the state and federal level.

Paliath said the RIC was not a reaction to the new IALI PAC, and claimed the RIC was in the works before the IALI announced it was forming a PAC. He added that now the IALI's PAC was further along and the RIC was still being built up.

In 2007, Paliath, who now runs his private law practice, ran for the state legislature from Maryland's District 42 and after winning the primary, lost in the general election to Democrat Steve Lafferty by 1,000 votes.

He said he could consider another run this year and pointed out that "the filing deadline is not till July, so there's still time." He said he would run if open seats result from people moving to other positions.

Meanwhile, as one of its first interactions, the RIC joined with The Indus Entrepreneurs DC Chapter last week to host a luncheon for Virginia's Governor-elect, Republican Bob McDonnell.

Dave, one of the co-hosts, said, "Education is the utmost priority to the Indian American and entrepreneurial mentality of the Indian community, making it the perfect match with the governor-elect."



Dilip Paliath