

Newly converted, Farris seeks faithful voters

Marty Trillhaase The Lewiston Tribune

Jimmy Farris, who grew up in Lewiston, is 33 years old.

He cast his first and only ballot for President Barack Obama in 2008.

Which means Farris, an ex-NFL wide receiver and college football standout, skipped at least six national elections.

Some of them were close and consequential.

Such as the Bush-Gore 2000 nail-biter.

Or the Bush-Kerry election four years later.

There were the 2006 mid-terms, where congressional Democrats prevailed, and the 2010 elections, when the Republicans revived.

Not to mention myriad primary elections, city council campaigns and school issues.

Farris missed them all.

Hardly unusual behavior for someone of Farris' generation. Turnout among younger voters is abysmally low. Not that it's much better for the general public. Even in Idaho, half the people stay home anymore.

They have lots of reasons.

Busy with their careers, families or social life, they don't follow public affairs. To avoid casting an uninformed vote, they make none at all.

They're disenchanted with politics and cynically believe their vote makes no difference.

Or they're passively willing to let others - party regulars or corporate donors, for instance - make the choices.

Farris - Idaho's newly minted Democratic candidate for the 1st Congressional District - has since had an epiphany.

"As I got older, I realized everything we do is affected by government, whether we like it or not," he said.

Farris' problem is the people who think like he used to probably will stay home in the next election as well.

To get where he wants to be, Farris must court people who do vote.

The folks who take the time to read papers and follow television news.

Those who get involved in their communities.

Not only people who live and breathe politics, but also those who at a minimum discuss it and have fully formed opinions. Such individuals go to the polls knowing whom they're voting for, whom they're voting against and why.

In the past 15 years, maybe they missed an election here or there but odds are they showed up for most.

Among them are voters who concede they're part of a political minority and rarely expect to prevail. In Idaho, they're called Democrats. They vote anyway because they believe it's the right - in fact, the obligation - of a citizen to engage in self-government. If voters stay home, the system atrophies. It becomes an oligarchy.

When a politician sits out an election, it gets noticed. Some years back, state lawmakers drew fire for failing to cast a school bond vote. Former 2010 GOP congressional hopeful Vaughn Ward took a grilling when he missed voting for president in 2008.

A young man who vaults to the top of the political food chain without so much as voting - let alone earning his credentials at the local or legislative level - comes off as an interesting biography but also a bit of an enigma, if not an opportunist.

Perhaps Farris can redeem himself in the coming months. But to do so, he must find a way to answer this question: Why should someone who takes voting seriously elect someone who obviously has not? - M.T.