

## Close splits?

**Randy Stapilus/Ridenbaugh Press**

If Idaho does not vote for Donald Trump in the general election days from now, that would mean the Democratic sweep would be so massive only Oklahoma and West Virginia, maybe, would stay Republican red.

That's not likely to happen, of course – as this is written a national win by Hillary Clinton for president looks probable but not that sweeping. And yet there is more to say about the Idaho presidential, owing in large part to Evan McMullin.

McMullin, who is on the ballot of only about a dozen states, was hardly known outside his family and co-workers only a few months ago, but now he has upended politics in Utah, and in part – not all – of Idaho. His professional career has run in national security (CIA), financial (he was an investment banker) and to a limited degree political (he was a House Republican staffer) mostly in the Washington, D.C. area. But what's also critical to know is that he was born in Provo, Utah and has sterling Utah/Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint connections. If you liked Mitt Romney, you can listen to Evan McMullin and like what you hear from him too.

In this time of Trump, when many Mormons are appalled by the Republican nominee, McMullin has some real appeal.

He is the center of ferocious arguments among other Republicans, though, recognizing that conservative votes may be split between McMullin and Trump. Recent polls have showed Utah voters almost evenly split between Trump, McMullin and Clinton – raising the astonishing possibility that Clinton could win Utah with no larger share of the vote than she normally would get (which isn't much).

Pundit Sean Hannity has gone apoplectic (“All this garbage from you Never Trumper jerks out there,” he shouted on one radio show. “November 9th, I have a lot to say about all of you.” And Fox's Lou Dobbs said in a tweet, “Look Deeper, He's [McMullin] nothing but a globalist, Romney and Mormon Mafia Tool.” That probably won't go over very well back in Utah, the one state where McMullin may be on the cusp of winning.

But it could impact Idaho as well. Touring around southern Idaho this week I heard the phrase “the I-15 strategy” in reference to McMullin's game plan, and it's understandable and in concert with what he's been doing so far. Many of the population centers where the LDS population is most concentrated are close by I-15, from St. George in the south to St. Anthony in the north, and McMullin stands to make a splash by working it hard.

Political people I talked to last week thought he probably will not pick up a big percentage in northern Idaho, and no more than sizable chunk from the Magic Valley on west. That means Idaho overall is not likely to tip away from the Trump column.

Polling last week that differentiated between the first congressional district (toward west) and the second (to the east) made exactly the same point, underlining it with this: In the second district, by itself, the vote for president could look a lot like Utah's – with the possibility that either McMullin or even Clinton could win there. (Only, that is, in the second district, not in the whole state.)

If so, that could mean some important fractures surviving after the election in Republican politics in Idaho, fractures unlike anything the state's party has seen before.

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