

"I Didn't Leave the Republican Party – The Republican Party Left Me"

I am proud to be an Idaho Mormon Democrat.

Not an oxymoron, there are thousands of Idaho Democrats all across this great state who are also members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I was raised in a Republican house hold by dedicated parents who happened to be devout Mormons. For years, I esteemed the tenets of the Republican Party as part and parcel to my own moral compass, aligning my political feelings and the political platform of the Republican Party with my firmly held sentiments on social justice and Constitutional protections.

For years, I was a dedicated Republican and happy with a party perhaps best epitomized by President Ronald Reagan. Pragmatic, Reagan was willing to compromise when necessary because he understood that he was president of the United States of America – not just for those in his own party – but for everyone who was a citizen of this great country.

Having worked on George W. Bush's campaign in Washington State over a decade ago, and traveled the world and seen many different cultures and peoples, I became troubled in recent years with an Idaho political system hell bent on ignoring hundreds of thousands of Idaho citizens, be they Hispanic, poor, Democrat, or otherwise moderate in their viewpoints.

Most recently, I became disenchanted with an Idaho legislature that publicly and unabashedly devalued the funding of Idaho's public schools. Using an economic downturn as a calculated excuse, the legislature tried to ignore its Idaho Constitutional duty to "establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools." This same legislature continues to damage public schools today, flying radically in the face of two-thirds of Idahoans who voted down their extreme measures last year in Props 1, 2 & 3.

In recent years, I didn't leave the Republican Party – the Republican Party left me.

The Republican Party is quick to talk about the notion of competition in business, even education, but is slow to recognize the value of competition in the political playing field, which ideological blind spot is disturbing because it – intentionally or not – devalues rigorous public discourse. When policymakers are not fully accountable to its people, how can public policy be adequately vetted?

It's ironic that the Idaho GOP platform is quick to want "unequivocal, thorough scientific research" when it comes to managing water flows for fish conservation, but somehow forgets to require the same demands for solid research for drastic, punitive, so called education reforms.

A healthy state government in Idaho needs a healthy Idaho Democratic Party.

While campaigning last year for the legislature, I was appalled to talk to hundreds of Idaho citizens who reluctantly, casually, often quietly admitted they were Democrats, with a quick eye glance to see who might be listening nearby. I was told by dozens that they feared retribution from a boss at work if they

revealed their political affiliation. Reprisals for political affiliation have absolutely zero place in a democratic republic like the United States of America and are entirely illegal.

LDS scholar Eugene England, himself a devout Republican, gave insight into the early political issues of the Latter-day Saints. Quoting President Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith in a May 1891 letter to John W. Young, Woodruff feared one-party domination in the state of Utah: "The more evenly balanced the parties become the safer it will be for us in the security of our liberties; and ... our influence for good will be far greater than it possibly could be were either party overwhelmingly in the majority."

Perhaps there is wisdom here.

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