

CHANGING POLITICAL PARTIES FOR OBAMA...

Over a quarter century ago, I changed my registration, which had up to then been Democrat. In 1976-77, in the days of the great white backlash, as it became known, I attempted to work with both political parties to help counter the lies that were being spread against Indian Tribes by well organized groups in several western states. I found high ranking staff in the Republican National Committee responsive to our concerns and willing to help inform Republican members of Congress on those truths.

Shortly thereafter, in 1981, I was asked to help the RNC prepare responses to a questionnaire sent to the Reagan presidential campaign regarding his stand on issues relating to Indian affairs. I saw that as an opportunity to help Ronald Reagan understand the unique relationship the Tribes have with the U.S. Government, their rights as governments and as people, and the Federal government's trust responsibility to them. With the help of Kirk Kicking Bird, Kiowa, and Robert McLaughlin, Standing Rock Sioux, I was able to hurriedly put together responses to that questionnaire. Surprisingly, word for word, that paper was adopted by the Reagan campaign as his platform.

I was impressed, and feeling that I could have an impact on the entire Republican Party by helping inform their candidates in gubernatorial, congressional and presidential campaigns, I changed my registration. Over the next nearly three decades, I was able to help Indian tribes by helping Republicans understand their unique place in America.

However, over the past year, I have seen that the Republican Party has been taken over by a wave of fearful, hateful and strident bigots.

I now consider myself an Independent for Barack Obama.

From my experience in Washington, DC, as Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians, I have always seen Senator John McCain as a truthful and decent man, willing to listen to Indian concerns and often willing to back legislation to bolster our rights and improve our lot. And I think that he still is a decent and respectable man.

However, what I have seen in recent political rallies for McCain and especially those for Governor Sarah Palin, frightens me – for Senator Obama's life and for our country in very dangerous times. I hear the voices of fear – unfounded fear of a black man to serve as our national leader; and I see the faces of hate that such irrational fear generates. They are the voices and faces of fear and hate that we saw in photos and reports in the 1960s of white men and women screaming hate-filled, racist epithets at courageous black children being escorted by soldiers into their first day of a public school, and at the brave young black woman entering the University of Alabama, theretofore not open to blacks.

Saying nothing of his qualifications, which to me have been manifestly obvious, the election of Senator Obama will signal to the entire world community a welcome change. America will be seen in a new light, a light in which our enemies and antagonists will find it difficult to make their mischief against us.

And here in America we can take a new pride in our system and in our people. More importantly, we can look into the faces of our children, regardless of any color or gender, and tell them in honesty that any of them, if they aspire to it, can become President of the United States.

That alone, to me, is worth the risk that those – both serious opposition and cynical bigots alike, see in his liberal proposals and his lack of experience.

Barack Obama is a man for our time, and we must not let that pass.

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