

WHY I CHANGED PARTIES

I started my political life as who knows what? Both of my parents were Republicans, my father further to the right than my mother. My father was proud of reinvigorating Great Neck Republican Club in a town and an ethnic community that was predominantly Democratic. My mother was more of a Rockefeller Republican than a Ronald Reagan admirer but the two of them took their show on the road, missionizing throughout the Democratic North Shore of Long Island.

I took the path less traveled, at least in my household. What alienated me was the Johnson commitment to the war in Vietnam, the dishonesty of Richard Nixon and the appalling economic disparity in the United States. To top it off, I was told that to get a job in the District Attorney's office in Nassau County, I would have to register Republican.

I cannot say that attending New York University or Jesuit Georgetown turned me into a liberal. Neither school rammed their philosophy down my throat and in any event I was a willing adherent to the Democratic point of view. I was also impressed with the fact that the Democrats seemed to support an open court system, even though I could never understand why entrepreneurial Republicans would not prefer a private Attorney General over the government in pursuing the interests of consumers.

I moved to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, where I worked for Republican appointed federal Judge Malcolm Muir and Republican President pro temp of the state Senate Henry "Merc" Hager, along with other "R's". Somewhere along the line I registered as an Independent but I am not sure why. My interests were primarily in the sciences when I was in high school and I thought I was going to be an engineer or an astrophysicist. I adored my engineer uncle, who was more right wing than my father, if that is possible. My Dad's brother sounded like a socialist to me and the two brothers had some pretty knock-down drag-out battles, even though they clearly loved each other as much as any two brothers could.

I will never forget the first time that my father met Malcolm Muir. It was at a ceremony in Philadelphia where I received the 1989 Milton D. Rosenberg Award from the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association. It was right around the time of Tiananmen Square where Chinese protestors were confronting a repressive government. Muir expounded to my father how terrible it was that the United States was not providing more aid and comfort to the protestors. My father responded that the United States should mind its own business and not interfere in the politics of other countries unless they were threatening us or the security of the world. My brother-in-law and I had to pry the two men apart before it got too ugly. I saw my career going right down the drain in a moment. My father, of course, had no guilt feelings about this encounter whatsoever.

Life as an Independent was boring. I could not vote in the primaries and I was a passive bystander. If I wanted any kind of political job, forget it. One of my retired partners observed that the United States was like the old fashioned Soviet Union when

the Communist Party was fully in charge. You could be any kind of Communist you wanted to be, so long as you were a Communist. The Democrats and Republicans came to resemble each other so much that sometimes it was hard to tell the difference.

In the election of 1992, I decided that I wanted to vote in the Democratic primary. I saw some real hope in Bill Clinton and I wanted to vote for him. I met Clinton at the Tuesday Club in Harrisburg where he knew the geography of Williamsport and the politics of Northeastern Pennsylvania. That was pretty impressive for a guy from Arkansas. I believed in the Clinton message that the United States could be uplifted through conservative fiscal management and an open-minded philosophy on social issues. Clinton promised to end the abuses of the welfare state, while not forgetting the plight of hardworking people at the margins of our economic pyramid. I voted for Bill Clinton twice. The disappointment arrived quickly. When I became one of the first Democrats to suggest that Bill Clinton resign, I faced a firestorm of angry responses. What upset me, did not upset the Republicans in the House who voted for Clinton's impeachment. The Bill of Impeachment did not include the fact that Clinton clearly lied in his civil deposition. As a lawyer, I fully realized that litigation in this country could not go forward if people commit perjury in the discovery process. Clinton had crossed that line for me and was not anyone I could respect. On the other hand, it was clear, as Dean Gormley pointed out in *The Death of American Virtue* that Starr spent more than \$44 million of taxpayer money trying to expose Bill Clinton's sexual misconduct. Unfortunately, Starr ignored some other serious issues that were never fully explored.

I was appalled by the incompetent management of George Bush, II, and almost equally distressed at the seat of the pants style of Barack Obama. It is hard for me to believe that the United States cannot produce greater competency than the last two "partners in failure" have provided. Without question, both men have had their high points. The Affordable Care Act has many terrific provisions and Republicans are to blame for the compromise that has made the bill so complex. Barack Obama has struggled to extricate the United States from several wars that have not been well executed. Part of the foreign policy bungling belongs to the Bush presidency but Barack Obama shares his share of blame.

All Democrats and Republicans have agreed on one thing and that is the worldwide danger of nuclear proliferation. If any unstable regime obtains a nuclear bomb, world civilization will be a thing of the past. Many presidents have made that point and few have done enough to prevent the possibility of rogue regimes obtaining the Bomb. President Obama's rejection of advice from our friends, is inexplicable. Democrats sent a clear message when a significant number of them walked out on the speech of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. At this point, it does not matter who invited him or what protocol between Speaker Boehner and President Obama was violated. What is important is the protection of the interests of the United States and the safety of the world community. On that score, the Democrats demonstrated on March 3, 2015, that they are willing to prevaricate with the future security of our nation and the lives of our children. That simply will not stand with me.

The Republicans, given their power in the House and Senate have an opportunity to uplift Americans through fiscal responsibility, economic growth and social

justice without further enriching the very wealthy. That is going to be a challenge since many Republicans are tied into those at the very top of the economic ladder. As a Republican, I will work hard to help the Republicans stick to the policy that made Teddy Roosevelt great; reward hard work while ensuring environmental and social justice. The two are not incompatible. In fact, making sure that all Americans can participate in the American dream of advancement and prosperity, assuring that all pay their fair share and yet keeping sticky government fingers at bay should be the goal of any responsible political party. I will not agree with the Republicans all the time and I intend to speak my mind, just as I did to Democrats.

It is my view that while we need robust political debate, Americans do not receive any benefit when the political parties are capable of being bought off by any group. When unions, or other rich and powerful groups (and there are plenty) can use their dollars without transparency to influence legislation and to buy the votes of our representatives then all is lost for the future of our form of government. Most Republicans will not agree with me on this point and George Will has written eloquently on his view that money and votes are one in the same. If a person can vote, why should they not be able to spend their money on whatever candidate they want. We must keep money from corrupting the political process or buying candidates will be no different than buying cereal. Republicans agree with this since it is ultimately in the interest of both parties to sanitize the process.

The Republicans should support a strong legal system so that the government will not have to intervene continuously to protect the lives and safety of its citizens. Big government has its place in a big country, but the private Attorney General should be encouraged whenever possible. There can be little argument that private enterprise usually does things better than government.

My father once said, "I didn't leave the Democratic Party, they left me." The Democratic Party will not continue to exist as we know it if it only supports those who are looking for a handout from the government. The Republican Party will not prosper if it only appeals to those with the biggest pocketbook. Hopefully, we can begin to have some dialogue between the parties so that the business of the people will not be shoved aside while the biggest meals are consumed by the Special Interests.

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