

## **Why This Conservative Republican Backs Biden**

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*“We got elected on ‘Drain the Swamp,’ ‘Lock Her Up,’ ‘Build the Wall.’ This was pure anger. Anger and fear is what gets people to the polls.” -- Steve Bannon, key Trump strategist, recently arrested for alleged fraud*

Nearly four years into Donald Trump’s presidency, the Republican Party can’t endure much more of Trump’s “winning.” Anger isn’t a winning governing philosophy. The number of self-identified Republicans is down, and Democratic identity is up. Women, the college educated, Latinos, and many alienated Republicans are fleeing the party.

The backlash has been playing out already in places like Arizona, where voters sent Barry Goldwater, John McCain, Jon Kyl, and Jeff Flake to the U.S. Senate. By the end of this year, Arizona is likely to have two Democratic senators.

Arizona is also where I served six years as a GOP conservative state senator, starting in 2012. It’s a place that makes a nice case study on where President Trump’s brand of nationalism has led the Republican Party, and to search for ways to reverse course.

I never remotely imagined getting into elected office. Known primarily as an entrepreneur who

founded SkyMall, I was also assigned by my church to be a pastor for a Spanish-speaking congregation of mostly immigrants. Arizona was then ground zero for white nationalist, anti-immigrant politics. The charge was led by Arizona Senate President Russell Pearce and exploited by the likes of Joe Arpaio, who liked to describe himself as “America’s Toughest Sheriff.” Pearce and allies proposed bill after bill attacking the undocumented immigrant community in ways that were increasingly authoritarian, uncharitable, and unworkable. Politically, these positions were intoxicating to white voters and seemed to deliver election win after win. But victory came at a cost. After enacting an infamous anti-immigration statute, SB 1070, which essentially made being in the country without papers a state crime, Arizona was boycotted nationally. Unrest and contention in our area grew. The business community and the faith community begged the legislature and governor to reconsider.

My own church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, put out a statement asserting that although countries had a right to have borders and immigration laws, “the bedrock moral issue ... is how we treat each other as children of God,” and that “... any state legislation that only contains enforcement provisions is likely to fall short of the high moral standard of treating each other as children of God.”

I saw firsthand how these policies in Arizona were breaking up families, alienating many Hispanic citizens sympathetic to the plight of the undocumented, while ignoring industries that needed immigrant labor to survive. Proponents were ignoring the moral implications of their policies, and ignoring research performed by think tanks such as the CATO Institute, which showed the benefits of immigrants to the economy.

Appalled, a Republican friend of mine, Jerry Lewis, ran against Russell Pearce in a precedent-setting recall election to unseat a senate president. Lewis won. Pearce allies responded by gerrymandering Lewis out of the district, clearing the way for Pearce to run again four months after the recall election. Lewis and others asked me to run, and I stepped up and beat Pearce by 12% in a 2012

Republican primary. It should be noted that from the time Lewis won in 2011, Arizona has not passed a single anti-immigrant bill through its legislature. The solution was simple, but not easy: confront intolerance and beat its proponents at the ballot box. It was hard to do when nearly the entire Republican establishment supported Pearce and feared crossing him.

It should also be noted that other politicians trafficking in angry nationalism have lost in Arizona and throughout the country. Iowa's Steve King, lost. Kris Kobach, lost. In Arizona, Sheriff Arpaio and Russell Pearce all lost multiple times. We were moving past nativist politics in Arizona when the country was overcome by Trump's election and we saw a national resurgence of it.

My new book, "The Horseshoe Virus," tells how we confronted a scourge much more harmful to America than COVID-19. More importantly, we offer the nation the solution to do so in future elections, including November 2020.

Those now rejecting Trump see that his slice-and-dice-the-electorate brand of politics isn't a winning formula for the Republican Party or a sustainable future for the United States. Nor is moving further into the nether-regions of anti-intellectual, know-nothingism. Trump's reflexive rejection of expertise, science, and data-driven decision-making show that he lacks the competency needed to lead this country.

But as Bannon encouraged him, Trump continues to exploit our anxieties and anger, stoking xenophobia to drive his base to the polls for his personal political benefit rather than inspiring us to solve America's problems. His false choice is that if voters don't choose Trump, they must want socialism or Antifa to come loot their neighborhood or have Mexican drug cartels take over or further liberalize abortion. In reality, we can fight the worst of illegal immigration and implement policies that honor America's goodness to immigrants in a way that benefits the country. We can have law and order and confront police brutality.

Many Republicans and conservative independents sense that under Trump something critical is broken in America. We aren't living up to "e pluribus unum." Trumpism is a cancer that causes Republicans to lose moral authority and intellectual vitality. A dose of chemotherapy is needed to purge the party of this malignancy.

For us dissenters, this election will not be about parties and more tribalism. It will be about reclaiming core values like respect for the truth, governing competency, civility, and strengthening the various institutions and traditions weakened by Trump. This is why, even as a lifelong conservative Republican, I can't vote for Donald Trump, and even though I disagree with Joe Biden on various points of policy, I will support him for president.