

The Blue Closet

by *Erik Good, Chair, Big Horn County Democratic Party*

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This topic has been on my mind for some time, and goes to the heart of that question that I keep asking myself- how can I be more successfully blue in a red state?

At a recent Wyoming Democratic Party meeting, we discussed "Bringing Democrats Home," focusing on how we can bring back or win over voters whose views align with ours but are registered Republicans because Democratic options are so limited in Wyoming primaries. The answer we kept returning to was simple: The current system benefits Republicans tremendously, they have no interest in reducing their power, and there aren't enough Democrats (supposedly) to fight back.

I'll admit, I registered as a Republican in 2022 to vote for Liz Cheney. Afterward, I switched back to Democrat and showered it off. It felt good to do something, even if it wasn't successful. But how many of us have registered as Republicans for a primary, only to find it didn't make a difference?

Our conversation raised this question- in all the times you've switched your registration to vote for or against someone like Liz Cheney- or even permanently registered as a Republican for more influence- how many times has that vote actually made the difference you were striving for in a primary?

My vote for Liz Cheney absolutely didn't make a difference- not even close. As the (Taking Away Your) Freedom Caucus continues

its rise to more and more power, it's increasingly clear that this registration-hopping strategy isn't working. As important as it may feel to have a voice in the primary, how many of us can actually say our decision to register and vote as a Republican ever actually changed the outcome?

Admitting you're a Democrat in Wyoming can be shockingly-unacceptably-scary. As someone who came out of the closet once, I can tell you I'm more comfortable talking about my husband than about being a Democrat. The Blue Closet is real, and the fear of being unsafe is powerful.

To be honest, I can't always bring myself to step out of that closet (my husband Michael is much better at it than I am). Just this weekend, on the way home from Buffalo, I forgot that I was wearing my "Cat Dads for Harris/Walz" shirt when I stopped at Ten Sleep Brewing. Walking across the parking lot, I almost turned around and went back to the car to grab my hoodie when I realized what I had on- but I decided to brave it.

The woman at the counter said to me, "I love your shirt."

Once my shock had cleared, I admitted to her that I had forgotten I was wearing it, and had almost gone back to cover it up out of fear of the reactions it would provoke. She smiled and said, "No. It's good."

Well, then.

In 2020, Joe Biden got over 700 votes in Big Horn County, where there are only 200 registered Democrats. That's three voters supporting a Democrat for every registered Democrat.

Even if some of those voters are Republicans who just didn't want to vote for Trump, it's still a sizable number. Imagine the headlines if the number of registered Democrats increased by

50%, 100%, or 200% this election. What would that mean for Big Horn County, where many Republicans think they're the only option? What would it show about our state, where Democrats are often sidelined by election rules? And what would it mean for our community to see there are more than just five Democrats here?

A friend of mine used to say "If you always do what you always did you always get what you always got."

In other words—nothing changes if nothing changes.

I left Wyoming over 30 years ago in part because I feared deep down that I would never be able to be gay and happy in Wyoming—that I would never be accepted. The irony is that when I came back 30 years later, I met and married my husband, and those whose acceptance I had been so worried about made a point of offering their congratulations—many even lamenting that they hadn't been invited to the reception. 18-year-old me never saw that one coming.

Coming out as gay became easier as more people did it, and people realized, wow, there are folks with different sexualities all around me, people I know and like—and everything's fine. Will Wyoming's Blue Closet open the same way?

Nothing changes if nothing changes.

So I ask you— what change is in *your* power this election cycle? Might a strategy besides trying to influence Republican primaries be more successful? Would it be more successful to show people that Democrats aren't nearly as rare as they would like to believe we are, and that they know and like us, and that they're fine, and their kids are fine?

When we fight, we win!

Erik Good has been Chair of the Big Horn County Democratic Party since 2023.