“Vote Bush and Cheney” bumper stickers decorate the parking lot. Annoying voices constantly scream “GO BUSH” during the presidential debates and the “Viva la Bush” stickers that line my hallway remind me of England’s cry “Long Live the King.” Now, before I offend any more Republicans, I must let you know that I am, by nature, a very conservative individual, probably 80-90% Republican, but I see a problem that must be addressed.

For the last 13 elections, or 52 years, Utah has consistently sent its electoral votes to the Republican Candidate. Utah has become so Republican that presidential candidates, Republican or Democratic, rarely, if ever visit Utah during election years. “Why bother?” Democrats and Republicans ask. Both sides know Utah is going to vote Republican no matter how much campaigning they do here. Because of this, Utah has lost some political power to influence presidential decisions and campaigning. Look at Florida, Iowa, Missouri and other “swing states”—they have become hot grounds that force the presidential nominees to address their needs. Thus, they gain more political influence and are better able to meet their citizens’ needs with the help of the federal government.

While other states are gaining power by being diverse, Utah loses power every time someone votes Republican. In fact, some Utah Democrats have become so discouraged that they are actually “swapping” votes with people in key swing states. In an attempt to change Utah’s image as an uncompromising Republican stronghold, I am going run against the grain and vote for the Democrats. I am planning to do this for the benefit of Utahns everywhere. Although most Utahns feel that the Republican platform best suits their ideals and morals, we need more Democrats because they would help balance and increase our political power, limit “vote pairing” within the state, reflect our social and moral values to the nation, and help each individual become more diverse, intelligent and tolerant.
Why Republican?

The majority of Utah voters vote Republican because they feel that the Republican platform best coincides with their beliefs, especially their moral standards. In addition, some voters cast their votes because of issues such as gun control, wilderness policy, or tax strategy. Many of these votes go to the Republican Party, but why? Most Utahns don’t realize that a liberal Democrat from Utah would be considered quite conservative if from any other state. Although they may differ in some public policies, most Utah Democrats represent the same moral values as the everyday Utahn, many are even Latter-day Saints. While some people may not agree with their policies, the Democratic candidates should at least be given a chance. Envision the future they offer and decide if even a part of it coincides with what you want. May I remind you that Napoleon Bonaparte once said, “Adversity is the midwife of genius.” How can the Republican Party expect to establish and maintain a brilliant and dynamic state government without the genius which is created by adversity or opposition, such as the Democratic Party?

The Church’s Share

Political observers nationwide share concern over Utah’s predominately one party political system. However, this is not the first time. Although the GOP has dominated the state of Utah for the last 56 years, this was not always so. In fact, the first election held in Utah was dominated by Democrats, who won 83% of the popular vote (Dave Leip). Realizing the problem, Apostle John Henry Smith went to the podium to declare that it was possible to be a good Latter-day Saint, and a good Republican (KUED). Wow, what a change since then! What happened!?

After a few more speeches and a membership drive, Republicans were soon competing with their Democratic counterparts, until 1948 anyways. Since then, Republican candidates have dominated the poll booths. This transformation came as the Republican Party dropped the polygamy issue and became more conservative. At the same time, “Mormon” society became increasingly more conservative and in-line with the Republicans.

Since the 1948 election, Republicans have won Utah’s electoral votes 13, going on 14, consecutive times. Because of this domination, some political observers cry “Party Foul” and claim that the church supports
the Republican Party. However, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is officially neutral and publicizes a statement on their political neutrality every year (LDS). The message is simple, “In this election year, we reaffirm the Church's long-standing policy of political neutrality. The Church does not endorse any political party, political platform, or candidate.” Although neutral, the church does urge members to "study the issues and candidates carefully and prayerfully," and also encourages members to serve in public offices as circumstances permit. Despite this official statement, the LDS majority still votes Republican every year, some even vote “straight-line” Republican. In addition to this overall conservative attitude in Utah, Democrats in the state occasionally suffer setbacks because of uninformed Republican candidates who sporadically make incorrect and controversial remarks. Such a case occurred during the 2000 State Election.

During that election, controversy flared when an LDS lawmaker and Republican, Bill Wright, claimed that the Democratic Party’s agenda is simply incompatible with LDS beliefs. In the heat of campaigning he incorrectly declared, "The issue is whether faithful members can in good conscience support the official tenets and substantiated agenda of the Democratic Party. The answer, of course, is NO" (Burton). Prior to Wright’s comments, Elder Marlin Jensen, then a member of the Quorum of the Seventies Presidency, had specifically fought that very concept when he said, “The notion that may prevail in some areas is that you can't be a good Mormon and a good Democrat at the same time. There have been some awfully good men and women who have been both and are both today. So I think it would be a very healthy thing for the church -- particularly the Utah church -- if that notion could be obliterated" (Online Articles Index). In addition, when President Hinckley was asked if one could be a strong member and a Democrat, he replied, “Yes, I think so. I don't know why you couldn't. It depends on what you believe as a Democrat in terms of some things. There are some things we don't subscribe to. We've got lots of Democrats in the church, lots of them, and they are good people” (Cushman). These “good people” include President Faust (Utah Government), President Heber J. Grant (Davis), President Hugh B. Brown (Davis), and many others so I do believe it safe to say that LDS Democrats won’t be cast out at the last day.

While some critics still believe the church’s leadership plays a large role in the election and administration policies of local political officials, Utah’s elected officials— including Democrats, Republicans,
members, and non-members—have been silent on the matter when one would expect any foul play to be immediately exclaimed. In addition, some assert that they have not been influenced by the church. Former Salt Lake County Commissioner Randy Horiuchi wrote, "As a non-Mormon, a Democrat and a minority, I was a consummate triple threat during my political life. But during the eight years I served in public office, [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] never once tried to influence a decision I made" ("Church Remains Politically Neutral").

Hopefully, everyone now realizes that it’s OK to be a Mormon Democrat. Despite some Republican’s opinions, you can still make the Celestial Kingdom as a Democrat, and -in the words of Elder Jensen- it may even be “a very healthy thing for the church” (Online Articles Index).

**Vote Swapping**

A recent front-page article from the Salt Lake Tribune screamed, “Feeling disenfranchised? Swap your vote, some say” (Warburton). The article then outlines the process to swap your vote with someone from a key swing state. First, register at http://www.votepair.org. Next, simply swap your vote with a third-party follower from Oregon, Ohio, Florida, or any other key state. The final act occurs at the polling booth. The “swapper” from Utah then votes for Ralph Nader, while the out-of-state “swapper” casts his vote for John Kerry.

VotePair’s mission (as found on their website): “Defeat George W. Bush. Support the critical voices of third parties. Rebuild America's progressive majority” (VotePair). By swapping votes, the no name, no chance candidates still qualify for federal matching funds, while Kerry’s odds of winning those key swing states increases. If enough voters swap, Kerry could win electoral votes he normally would not have and so defeat President Bush. With the election so close, just a few “swapped votes” could change a state’s outcome. Remember Florida?

While technically legal, I have some serious moral problems with this program. Hopefully, you do, too. First, the Electoral College was designed for many reasons. Among those, it is used to balance large and small states’ power and reduce the affect of regional popularity so that the President represents the entire country, not just the Northeast and West Coasts. No matter how outdated it may be, the Electoral College is still the system in force so we should play by the rules. Second, common sense tells me that greedy people will still vote for
their original candidate because greed may govern their action and it is impossible to hold one to his or her promise inside the poll both. Finally, Democratic voters in Utah could change the overall results without representing Utah’s true popular vote. The first and second reasons should be self-explanatory for most people, but I may need to further clarify my final fear.

My concern came as I logged onto Votepair.org; over 6500 Utah voters had already registered to swap votes. Now this may only represent 1% of Utah’s voters, but it is eight times more “swappers” than any other state! It concerns me that Utah Democrats feel so left out. “Jeff” left a quote on the website which reads, "I live in Utah. The most republican state in the nation. I happen to be a democrat who voted for Gore. My vote did not count because of the stupid Electoral College. By swapping my vote, I can finally have my vote count for a democrat. Go Kerry!" (VotePair). As a conservative who slightly favors President Bush, I am also concerned that these votes may actually make a difference as this race has become “razor-close.”

For these reasons, may I again suggest that, for the good of Utah, you consider voting Democrat? Just imagine your disappointment if your candidate, President Bush, barely loses the election because some Utah voters felt as if their vote didn’t matter and so swapped the votes which won the election… for John Kerry. Force them to keep their real vote inside the state.

The Power

The state of Utah has found itself between a rock and a hard place. Unlike California, Texas, and New York, we do not have the electoral votes that would force the two political parties to acknowledge our needs and wants. In addition, we are so onesided (the estimated 2004 poll spread for Utah has Bush winning by 37%) that the two main parties again look by and direct their efforts towards the “swing states” states, like Pennsylvania, Florida, and Iowa. Everyone knows that Utah will vote Republican, so why would Democrats even attempt when they trail by 37%? And why should the Republican Party campaign here when we are already “thrown in the bag?” Much like the Democrats, the time spent campaigning in Utah would be of no value to them because we’re already a ‘sure thing.’

To compound this problem, we have next to no power in the Democratic Party. Since most of our state congressmen are Republicans, we have some power within the Republican Party, but within the Democratic
Party we have no influence. Why is this? Is it because our Democrats are immoral, unintelligent, and poor leaders? NO. We have had some amazing candidates who have simply been ignored. Most Utahns don’t understand that many of Utah’s Democrats are, for the most part, conservative liberals. They represent the moral and social values of most Utahns; however, they’re not Republican and so not elected. We need their differing economic and political opinions to represent us on Capitol Hill and in Washington D.C., but instead, we stick to the likeminded Republicans every year. Professor Eugene England, a former Republican English Professor at BYU wrote “For about 25 years Democrats have been a steadily dwindling minority in Utah, and thus Republicans are developing the attitudes and practices of one-party rule. Those attitudes and practices are more dangerous than the actual beliefs or programs of either party” (Ostler).

One party rule endangers the very freedoms we enjoy. Without a strong check or balance within our state’s government, the dominant party can do whatever they would like without opposition. While relatively unfeasible among many trusting Saints, a government, even one containing many LDS members, can become corrupted from too much power. A person needs only to look as far as the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants to find examples of governments and righteous people becoming corrupted by power. D&C 121:39 covers this subject very well, “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.” For this very reason, we must help Utah step out of this one-party rule.

Our Loss

I also believe that Utahns, students in particular, damage their intelligence, tolerance, and persuasive powers by becoming too close-minded to debate and discussion with the opposition. Some Latter-day Saints even seem to find absolute or divine truth in the Republican Party. In his essay “Why Utah Mormons Should Become Democrats,” Professor England writes:

My concern is that religion and politics are being entangled again in Mormonism, not among high-ranking leaders so much as local leaders and Mormon popular culture… One of the most troubling elements… is the growing Mormon tendency to find absolute or at least superior, even divine, truth in the Republican Party platform (95).
When we, as a church body, are split by political alliances, we are not able to stand as strongly. For this very reason Alma the Younger gave Nephihah his seat as Chief Judge over the people of Nephi. Alma knew that he could not serve his people as well when he functioned as both the Chief Judge and Prophet. Although Alma was an amazing Chief Judge, he knew to whom his priorities should be given. Likewise, we must split our politics from our religion and our religion from our politics (however, we should not take out moral values and standards), so that we can best serve the Lord. In addition, no one can find all the answers or any of the saving ordinances within a political party, so do some research and discover what candidates (regardless of party) best suits your needs and values.

Moreover, as the Democrat-Republican split in Utah widens, it becomes not only a political split, but also a religious one since most Utah Democrats are non- and disaffected Mormons. Professor England later addresses this very issue as well as several other Constitutional dilemmas that arise from one-party dominated government:

You can see how important it is for some Utah Mormons to become Democrats. First, it might produce some national leaders who could help stop the executive branch usurpation of power over war that right now threatens our Constitution and our honor as a nation, our economy, and our lives. Second, it would produce a vital two-party system in Utah, one that could prevent a destructive Mormon/non-Mormon split… Third, it might help us all learn the basic lesson of our Constitution, that virtue and truth are the province of no single person or party—in fact, are best found in the process of debate, which include listening because we want to, adjustment, compromise and then honest and honorable acceptance of the results… (103).

Interestingly, Professor England wrote the book in 1995 (after we first invaded Iraq), but still six years before President Bush informally bypassed Congress and declared war on Iraq and Afghanistan. As you should now be able to see, it is vital that more Utahns vote Democrat so that we can become a stronger, more versatile, and more united Utah.
While I love my school, I have recently recognized a serious problem. During informal hall interviews, I asked 37 of my roommates if they were Democrats, Republicans, or in the middle. I found 32 Republicans and 5 in the middle, but sadly no Democrats. Before I came to BYU, I knew it to be very conservative, but WOW!!! I would like a little diversity. The liberals here have no voice and believe I understand the cause, so let me share it. First, the Democrat to Republican ratio must scare those Democrats who would like to speak out. In fact, I can count the Democrats I’ve met so far on two hands. Second, peer pressure turns semi-Democrats into Republicans when they come here. It’s called conformity; they just want to fit in. Third, the Democrats who do stand up are relentlessly criticized for their beliefs and so lower their voices. Another Professor from BYU, Chad Davis of the Political Science Department, quipped, “Unfortunately a few students in political science classes feel unrestrained due to the environment and boo or make derogatory statements when someone like Clinton or Kennedy is mentioned. It is unfortunate we do not have more political diversity here because that kind of behavior would be confronted by other students” (Ostler). Finally, many undecided voters become Republicans as other Republicans frighten them into believing that Democrats fight the church’s beliefs and standards; however, this is simply not true.

Although from a Republican community in Utah, I miss my high school’s diversity. After the AP tests this year, many of my teachers opened the remaining time up to politics and philosophy. It seemed as if all my classes contained very outspoken Democrats and Republicans. Oh how I miss debating with them! I’d contend with the Democrats on social issues and then contend with the Republicans on economic issues. It really opened my eyes and mind to the political issues of our day. Issues are not simply one-sided; there are pros and cons to every single one. When we repress the opposition, we truly miss out on the intellectually stimulating conversations which help broaden our understanding. That is why more Utahns need to become Democrats- no one party can single-mindedly make the best decisions, they need an opposition to refine their beliefs into something that will truly work.

I can only hope that you, as the reader, realize the need for more Democrats in Utah, especially at BYU. Currently, it is more than a need, it is almost a necessity. Follow Jacob’s example in 2nd Nephi 2:11 and create
the opposition that must exist, for without opposition, “righteousness could not be brought to pass.” Jacob then continues on the need for opposition in verse 15 which states, “…and in fine, [in] all things which are created, it must needs be that there [is] opposition.” Without this precious opposition, laws are not refined and justice is not brought to pass. Vote Democrat.


<http://www.uselectionatlas.org/USPRESIDENT/>


<http://www.voteutah.org/moments/statehood00.html>


“Online Articles Index.” LDS Democrats Online. 23 Oct. 2004.

<http://www.geocities.com/ldsdemocrats/articles.html>


http://newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/24239


