

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS IN THE TRUMP ERA, MISSOURI EDITION



Donald J. Trump, 34-time convicted felon and President-elect of the United States of America

“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.”

When Donald Trump was reelected as president, that certainly qualified as being given a truckload lemons in my book. But the lemonade making? I just got a surprising vision of what that looks like.

On the southeast edge of the metro Kansas City area is the town of Belton, located in Cass County. Not all that long ago, it was an isolated rural farm town, well away from the Big City. Today, though, it has become somewhat of a bedroom community, still heavily rural but now with the addition of folks who want a more affordable place to live while commuting to their jobs elsewhere in the Kansas City area. Even with this shift toward being a bedroom community, in the 2024 presidential election, Trump carried Cass County 65%-33%. Belton is not some blue pocket in red Missouri – it is strongly red.

The current state representative for Belton is Republican Michael Davis, who has a degree in education from Harris-Stowe University in St. Louis (a white guy at an HBCU!?!) and a JD from Washburn University in Topeka where he served as president of the local chapter of the Federalist Society. He was the youngest member of the Missouri legislature when he was first elected, he has voted to defund Planned Parenthood and to cut taxes, and he sits on the House Judiciary Committee. All in all, he is the model of a Young Republican.

Except.

In advance of next year's legislative session, lots of legislators pre-file bills with the clerk, and one of the bills filed by Davis has caught a lot of attention. The purpose of the bill is quite simple, and the text itself is a mere two pages. The bill would repeal Missouri's prohibition on convicted felons running for public office.

Having a Republican sponsoring a bill like this is more than a little odd, given the "lock 'em up and throw away the key!" mentality of many in the GOP, especially in Missouri. But Belton, like many rural areas in Missouri, has a non-trivial portion of the population with minor drug convictions, or who have friends and family members with such convictions. While I can't imagine that there are a huge number of these folks who want to run for office, a bill like this says to these people "If you've served your time, we want to welcome you back into society." So good on Davis, even if that runs counter to the usual GOP message.

But the weird part of the story isn't a Republican trying to help felons reenter society. The weird part is how he is trying to make the case for the bill, which he has titled the Donald J. Trump Election Qualification Act.

Says Davis in an interview with the Missouri Independent:

"Having conversations now, when I bring up the topic, a lot of them are squeamish about the idea of having felons in office, but then, if they're Republican, I remind them that they probably voted for one," Davis said. . . .

[snip]

"A lot of people don't don't think about the fact that Donald Trump, if he met all the other requirements, if he was a Missouri resident, he could not run for

state representative or state Senate,” Davis said. “He would be precluded from running for these offices, but was able to be re-elected president of the United States. So I think that at least causes people to start thinking about the issue a little more than they might otherwise.”

Remember: this is a Republican member of the state legislator saying these things, not some liberal from Kansas City or St. Louis.

I know a bunch of folks, mostly in St. Louis and Kansas City, who have worked for years to shift the state of Missouri to focus on the reentry of felons into society rather than solely focus on locking them up to keep them out of society. I am confident in saying that **none** of these folks voted for Trump. But if Davis wants to hold up Trump as a reason to embrace a shift in the judicial system that worries not only about locking folks up but also about how to help folks reenter the world after time in prison, these folks will say more power to him. Passing this bill wouldn't do anything to mitigate the mess that is about to be unleashed in DC, but it would change the lives of hundreds of families in Missouri for the better.

“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade” never sounded so appropriate.