



An argument for why Mississippi needs a balanced, 2-party system

Editor's Note: The following is a column by a Mississippi newspaper colleague that was published in his and numerous other newspapers across the state back in January. It is being published here, not in support of any one candidate or political party, but as an observation of our 2-party system. The column reflects Emmerich's opinions only, but touches on a topic worth putting some thought toward.

Guest Column

By **Wyatt Emmerich**

Publisher of Jackson's Northside Sun



Count me as one of the few people who believe the United States, and many other developed countries, have a good, balanced way of governing.

It really comes down to money and who gets it. The free market theory argues that people who earn the money should keep it. The government theory argues that government should tax the money and reallocate it for important social needs.

In my opinion, neither side is absolutely right or wrong. A balance is needed.

I generally believe the free market is a better way to allocate resources. People should make their own purchasing decisions. That being said, we need roads, schools, courts, police, defense and a host of other services for society to function properly. That requires taxation.

Nobody likes taxes, especially those who pay the most. And nobody likes bad roads or crumbling infrastructure.

Over time, our country has developed a stable two-party system. The Republicans advocate low taxes and more free market. The Democrats advocate higher taxes and more government spending.

The nature of politics is such that you need 50 percent plus one of the votes to be in power. So our two parties are delicately balanced. Elections go back and forth.

Unfortunately in Mississippi, we have a tradition of one-party dominance. That kills the delicate give and take necessary to optimize society. The Democrats dominated forever. Now the Republicans are firmly entrenched.

Two Northsiders whom I respect for their intelligence recently published two opposing views on this issue – Jon Pritchett, president and CEO of the Mississippi Center for Public Policy, and Cecil Brown, current central district Public Service Commissioner and a longtime important Mississippi Democrat.

Pritchett focused on Mississippi's 10.2 percent state and local tax burden which is high compared to other Deep South states. He presented an argument looking at low tax states such as Oklahoma and Montana, which have made excellent gains in reducing poverty.

Pritchett argues that as you lower taxes, you increase prosperity and reduce poverty. He writes, "What is the data and evidence telling us? It is informing us to choose capitalism and free markets. It's telling us to move away from a 'command and control' economic system and start relying more on individual freedom, consumer choice, and private competition. It's telling us to allocate more resources towards free enterprise and fewer resources towards the political process. If we can start to get Mississippi's economy growing by adopting policies that prioritize economic liberty, we can experience prosperity.

"When states grow, other measures of quality of life are improved. Educational outcomes improve. Crime rates go down. Health measures improve and life expectancy expands. Montana and Oklahoma are real-life examples of how lives can be measurably improved when states make a commitment to economic freedom. They've shown us the road map. There is no reason Mississippi can't take the road to freedom. All it takes is the will and the leadership to take the first steps."

Pritchett is presumably happy with the Mississippi Republican Party's game plan of reducing taxes and cutting government.

Cecil Brown, in contrast, is extremely critical of the Republicans and their persistent effort to cut. Brown was the state's chief financial officer and chief of staff for Democratic Gov. Ray Mabus. He also served as a state representative for many years.

In a speech at the Stennis Capitol Press Forum at the Capital Club in downtown Jackson, Brown lambasted the Republicans.

Brown said, "The state revenue estimate for the 2019 fiscal year is \$39 million more than the revenue estimate for 2015. That is an annualized increase of less than one quarter of 1 percent. That is pitiful, and, if you consider that millions of dollars of what used to be special funds are now in the general fund, there is probably no growth at all.

"As a result - we have seen significant budget cuts in the last four years, and most of our state employees have not had a pay raise in more than 10 years.

"Here are some examples of cuts. Comparing appropriations from the 2015 fiscal year with current appropriations: Library Commission cut 17 percent - \$2 million; Community college support cut 8 percent - \$20 million; Health cut 20 percent - \$38 million; Mental health cut 3 percent - \$17 million; Ag and commerce cut 10 percent - \$1.5 million; MDA cut 15 percent - \$5 million; Forestry cut 6 percent - \$1.7 million.

"We fund our public schools at one of the lowest rates in the nation. On average, we pay our teachers \$19,000 per year less than the national average and more than \$6,000 less than surrounding states. As a result, we had more than 2,000 teacher vacancies at the beginning of the new school year. Our dropout rate is one of the highest in the country. Our test scores are among the worst in the nation, and absenteeism in the public schools is endemic. We focus on fewer than 1,500 kids in charter schools while the 465,000 kids in public schools go without adequate resources. Over and over we hear that the number one item on business shopping lists is an educated workforce, while our educators and children struggle to deal with leaking roofs, inadequate and outdated technology and overcrowded classrooms.

"The life span of the average Mississippian is a full four years less than that of the average American. We did not expand Medicaid so we gave up billions of dollars of federal money that would not only have improved our health statistics, but would have provided thousands of new jobs and prevented our community hospitals from closing. As a result of that decision, hundreds of thousands of Mississippians do not have access to adequate health care."

So there you have it. Two intelligent people who care about our state, each with a fundamentally different view on how we can achieve progress. The debate goes on.

Too bad Mississippi doesn't have two mainstream, competitive political parties to carry the debate all the way to the ballot box.

The two-party model has served our nation well, but our state is mired in a monopolistic one-party system that stifles options and leads to lopsided public policy.



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to ensure that our community, our home, has a fair and impartial Chancery Clerk

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- Live in the Vernal Community
- 2 Daughters - Harper & Piper
- Served as the Election Commissioner for Beat Four for the past 8 years
- Worked at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution for nearly 20 years
- Have served as the Director of Education at SMCI for the past 11 years
- Maintained my credentials as an AA Certified Educator for the State of Mississippi

I WILL WORK HARD FOR THE CITIZENS OF GREENE COUNTY

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Sarah

JAMES

Greene County

CHANCERY CLERK