

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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Gay-Bashing By Tommy Thompson

Tommy Thompson's campaign manager created a furor when he posted a clip of Rep. Tammy Baldwin dancing at a Gay Pride event - the implication being that Baldwin's sexual orientation somehow made her unsuitable for the senate position her and Thompson are vying for. Thompson reassigned the staff member, concluding that a shuffling of his staff was enough to disavow any anti-gay bias on the part of him or his staff.

I see the controversy somewhat differently. Thompson is in his 70s, having lived most of his life in a culture that ostracized and vilified gays. A much younger Baldwin has lived most of her life in a society that accepted gayness as a permissible lifestyle. The electoral contest between Baldwin and Thompson is more of a contest between the old guard and someone representing the future. Sure, Thompson has recast himself as a conservative ideologue who wants tax breaks for the rich and the rest of the Tea Party agenda. But fundamentally, the real question is whether we want to live in the past or embrace the future. Thompson doesn't understand this. He is counting on winning based on the nostalgia vote.

Back in the 1990s, when Thompson was governor, we had years of budget surpluses, a growing economy and everything was rosy (if you didn't happen to be in prison at the time). Thompson left office at the height of his popularity, before his spending policies crashed state government and left us with multi-billion dollar deficits. Most people are not aware that Thompson presided over a boom in productivity gains based on the integration of personal computers into businesses. Where once it took many hours to process office paperwork, it now takes minutes. These gains gave us a huge gain in tax revenues which Thompson squandered during his tenure. When the productivity gains faded, so did the surpluses, leaving the state broke and plunging into debt to maintain the massive bureaucracy Thompson created. The now-massive prison system Thompson created was the major beneficiary of Thompson's largess. If not for the hundreds of millions of dollars being thrown away on needless warehousing of prisoners, Wisconsin would not be suffering.

Thompson is lucky, not skilled at governing. Now he wants to be senator so he can reward his political supporters and cronies who made him rich (he has over \$10 million in assets). There is a very good reason why he won't release his tax returns. It would most likely show how much money he made and how few taxes he paid - just like Romney.

That seems to be a trait of many Republican candidates. They paid less in taxes than anybody else yet are campaigning on the terrible tax burden rich people have. The assertion, of course, is that there are so few jobs because those poor millionaires cannot afford to open more businesses because the tax burden has deprived them of all their money.

The reality is that the constant redistribution of our nation's wealth into the hands of a privileged few has left the other 90% of society without any money to spend. With no money, there is no consumer demand and no business operator with a lick of sense is going to hire more employees or open new businesses if there is no one capable of buying their products.

There is a stark contrast between Thompson and Baldwin. The old elitist, anti-gay, anti-worker regime versus the new inclusive progressive movement where everyone deserves a slice of our country's bounty.

Which do you choose?