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Jones: Desperate for democracy

By Casey Jones

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Utah's representative theocracy form of government is threatened by a renewed interest in democracy. (There's even talk of establishing one!)

Of course, I'm kidding. We already have a democracy. The GOP supermajority only *thinks* it rules by divine authority. In reality, Republican lawmakers are selected by extremist party delegates who, after a nod toward Temple Square, choose conservative candidates who are guaranteed to win election in their gerrymandered districts.

That, coupled with the state's predisposition toward prescription painkillers, probably explains Utah voters' tendency to turn off instead of turn out.

Our lack of engagement is best exemplified by some of the lowest voting rates in the states, and former Gov. Jon Huntsman's decision to try to jump-start democracy by appointing a Governor's Commission on Strengthening Utah's Democracy, an advisory board that's pondering assorted ethics and election reforms for new Gov. Gary Herbert and the Legislature to ignore.

There's not a lot of interest in wholesale ethics reform on Capitol Hill. Where Huntsman saw widespread apathy, a lack of public participation and a disconcerting democratic malaise, the legislative majority sees a small but loyal electorate that never fails to elect them. Why mess with a sure thing?

Herbert also seems indifferent to reform. The governor dropped into one of the commission's meetings this month to discuss campaign contribution caps and burst the group's bubble.

"It is I, Gary, son of Duane, from the castle Herbert, King of the conservatives, defeater of Democrats, sovereign over all of Utah," he said, adding, "and I don't give one whit for caps on campaign contributions." However, Herbert did say he'd send a copy of the commission's proposals to Beijing, where the governor who actually asked for the recommendations resides.

The reasons Utahns are not engaged are legion. And some have nothing to do with politicians who pal around with lobbyists and sell their souls to campaign contributors. For example:

- Too many rug rats; not enough baby sitters.
- No habla Ingles.
- Ill-timed elections that coincide with football season and the networks' new fall lineups.

But mostly, Republicans don't vote because they're sure Republicans will win, and Democrats don't vote because they're sure the Democrats will lose. Something needs to be done to even the odds and generate public interest in elections, perhaps parimutuel wagering.

What we really need is a genuine two-party system -- not a dominant party that slam dunks the token opposition the way the Globetrotters maul the Washington Generals.

And that means the Dumbocrats need to wise up and adopt guerrilla tactics to even their odds.

The party of Clinton and Kennedy should ply Republican leaders with hookers and booze. (The lawmakers would then become Democrats, or the hookers would become Mormons. Either way, society wins.)

It should counter gerrymandering with migrations, moving en masse every decade after legislative districts are redrawn.

And it should establish Democratic sleeper cells in GOP districts. Members would pose as Republicans, flying flags on Pioneer Day, attending tea parties, giving birth to passels of children. Then, when activated, they would run for office, win election and defect to the Democratic side of the aisle.

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