



Primary Mistake: How the Washington Republican Establishment Lost Everything in 2006 (and Sabotaged My Senatorial Campaign)

Steve Laffey

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"When I ran for reelection as the mayor of Cranston, there was an independent candidate running whose only claim to fame was that he wanted to keep a thirty-five-foot inflatable gorilla in his backyard. He was endearingly referred to as Gorilla Man. I never thought to say, 'Why is Gorilla Man running?' When the debates were scheduled, I showed up and debated him along with the Democratic candidate. I never said, 'I won't debate Gorilla Man.' I never thought he couldn't run. This is America...."

The fascinating thing about the whole experience was how pathetic the Republican establishment seemed. After all, they were supposed to be the ones in charge. Who was I? I was just the mayor of a midsize city in the country's smallest state, with only four years of political office under my belt. I was the David to their Goliath, the 1998 U.S. Olympic hockey team to the Soviet Union machine.

Following my conversations with the aforementioned folks, I began to wonder: Is this what happens at the national level? Does power trump ideology and principle? "Of all the conversations I had with [the GOP establishment] not one involved a discussion about what I could offer them as a U.S. senator. They never talked about tax cuts, the war on terror, or spending cuts. These conversations were designed to convince me not to run. If anything, they had the opposite effect...."

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