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## **Why Greg Orman Matters.....to Kansas and America**

**By: Cain Pence**

I remember fondly the summer before my senior year of high school. I was at the apex of my Glory Days at Mankato East High School in southern Minnesota. I had just been elected Minnesota Boys' State Governor and was heading to Washington DC to attend the American Legion Boys' Nation program. It was 1993, Bill Clinton was in his first year of office, thirty years from when he famously met John F. Kennedy at the same Boys' Nation program. Life was great: all my close friends and relatives were well, women were a new found mystery, Mom was so proud of her boy (and still alive) and Dad was my hero. The Catholic Church, which a year earlier I had been confirmed into, was the surest way to salvation and politics was a noble profession for good men and women of character. The future beckoned, people were decent, priests always served God and politicians rarely lied. I believed it all.

Before heading off to Georgetown University, the late school counselor Dennis Blomquist, who had recommended me to Boys' State stopped me in the hall. I still remember what he told me 25 years ago...."you're going to do great things Cain, but you're the second most ambitious guy to come through these hallways. The first was Greg Orman. Greg has that special ability to bring people together and get the best from them. You have to meet him someday." Greg was 7 years older than me and while I knew he had been elected Boys' State Governor and Boys' Nation President, I was probably more interested in his very good looking younger sisters who were closer to my age and the source of many a teenage boys' dreams in Mankato. Full disclosure: Greg's sisters never looked twice at me but fortunately when Prom night came the good Catholic girls at Mankato Loyola High School gave me a glance. Enough about my high school love life, it may come back to haunt me!

Many commentators view Orman as a spoiler who will throw the Kansas Governor race to Kobach. Their logic is that Orman should have dropped out to help Kelly and that he will split the liberal and independent leaning vote. Editorials and Facebook comments from Democrats tend to think Orman is an apostate for refusing to bow out and that his candidacy will hasten the Apocalypse by bringing a reactionary Kobach administration to power. I have watched the race and the first two debates from afar.

If anyone should exit the race it should be Laura Kelly. While sincere and knowledgeable, Kelly is, quite honestly, too boring. To outsiders, she comes across as a lightweight. Her persona and ideas seem dated and stale. Kobach vs Orman is a real match up. The two Ivy League products present Kansas with a real choice between red meat conservatism and pragmatic centrism. Greg Orman was elected Boys' Nation President. Each state (with the exception of Hawaii) sends two delegates to the program. Out of the

roughly 100 delegates, about 40 run for President. Greg isn't afraid of a field of three, or a couple more if you count the libertarian and other independent in the race.

I am no shill for the Orman campaign. I have not spoken to Greg in over a decade and my own political views are strongly pro-life, pro-gun and anti-illegal immigration. I respect Kris Kobach. Orman, like Kobach, can come across as arrogant and aloof. It's a good thing they held one of those debates outside at the Kansas State Fair because getting the egos of Kobach and Orman in a regular room would be a difficult task. Running against the two party system is easier than crafting constructive public policy with dozens of legislators who belong to those parties independents rail against. A pox on both your houses works well in debates, not so well in the halls of power. Orman needs to explain specific policies, not just express animosity to the status quo.

Nonetheless, as a student and writer of American politics I believe more is at stake here than just this race. Americans are tired of the two party duopoly. We are tired of simply red vs blue, Burger King or McDonalds, both bad for our health. We need more beachheads for the Independent movement and more elected officials not tied to the two party puppet masters. Orman is important to more than Kansas. His election would represent an important milestone for the Independent movement. We need articulate intelligent leaders who are not tied to outdated play books. If they do not win, we need independent candidates to plow the fields for future leaders to grow and foster new ideas and fresh paradigms. Orman represents a big group of voters who are greatly underrepresented in the American political arena. Sometimes, as Kansas City Chiefs fans can appreciate, a new quarterback represents risk....he can also represent excitement and new strategies for success.

Despite his business acumen and personal wealth, I truly believe Greg Orman wants a rising tide to raise all boats. When he speaks about helping the working class, he remembers his mother who raised a bunch of kids with very modest means in Mankato. When he speaks of small business growth, he recalls his small businessman father who owned a furniture store in Kansas. When he speaks about national economics, he can consult with the big boys from McKinsey and Princeton that he also knows. Not many men are at home with struggling mothers, small businessmen and the Wall Street crowd, but Greg Orman is. That is a good thing for Kansas and for attracting outside investment and talent.

My mother, who was so proud of her son meeting the President, suffered for years from the mental illness of schizophrenia. Her life ended in tragedy. My father, who I admired so much when young, quickly remarried and the resulting dysfunctional family unit caused me more grief than I ever imagined. My own personal relationships and financial dealings have often failed. Many of the priests in the Catholic Church who I thought were such good men turned out to be quite fallen and the men and women who make up the American political order did not turn out to be all noble truth speakers. Yet, on occasion I still look at that picture of a young idealistic Midwestern boy shaking the President's hand in the Rose Garden. It always makes me grin. I bet sometimes after he puts those photogenic young daughters to bed after a long day of listening to the criticism, Greg Orman does the same with his picture of him and Ronald Reagan.

I still go to Mass on Sunday and I still vote in November. I still listen to my Dad when he talks and I still believe our states, our churches and our families can improve with effort and determination. Creating a

new voice in American politics outside the machine will not be easy, but Greg Orman is a worthy candidate for the task. Despite the struggle, it is a noble fight to work for a better America and a more participatory democracy. Despite the naysayers, it is a worthy endeavor to advocate new ideas and different solutions to old problems. And despite the uncertainty and lack of specifics, it is important to believe the future can be made better, that is why, as Mario Cuomo once noted, "We campaign in poetry and govern in prose."

Judy Garland was born in Minnesota but famously referred to Kansas as, "no place like home." When I see Greg Orman with his beautiful wife and daughters running for Governor of Kansas I'm glad he has found a good home. I still remember the young optimistic Boys' State Governor I first heard about a quarter century ago on the prairie of southern Minnesota who wanted to change the world. If the yellow brick road doesn't lead to the Governor's Mansion in Topeka, Greg can always head North on the well paved path of Interstate 35..... Minnesota has given independent Governors a chance before.