

# Editorial: We need people of robust faith in both political parties

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One of the more interesting religion stories of the young summer has been [Tim Farron's decision to step down as leader of Britain's Liberal Democrat party](#), succumbing to the challenge of reconciling his Christian faith with his political leadership.



Marv Knox

The Liberal Democrats took a unique stand in Britain's recent snap elections. Theirs was the only party with national reach that offered Britons another referendum on leaving the European Union. But they failed to gain support, and their campaign staggered under questions about Farron's faith and political fitness.

"From the very first day of my leadership, I have faced questions about my Christian faith," particularly regarding homosexuality, Farron said in a Reuter's news article. "I've tried to answer with grace and patience. Sometimes, my answers could have been wiser."

## No answers

Ultimately, he couldn't provide answers to assuage the left wing of his left-

leaning party.

“Farron ... concluded that it was impossible for him to stay as leader of a progressive, liberal party and live as a committed Christian, despite not seeking to impose his views on others,” Reuters reported.

Farron’s departure has left Christians in Britain [wondering if they have a place in their nation’s politics](#). “His resignation reflects the fact that we live in a society that is still illiberal in many ways and is intolerant of political leaders having a faith,” explained Sarah Latham, director of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. “This urgently needs to change. It will change only if Christians step up and get involved in all areas of life and change the rhetoric.”

Of course, both politics and cultural responses to religion are different in Great Britain and the United States. Farron’s departure scenario would not necessarily play out in the U.S. political system. Still, this situation points to the necessity of robust, active faith involvement in both American political parties.

### **Vacuum will be filled**

If people of faith abandon our national public square, the vacuum will be filled. Most certainly, it will be filled by partisans whose political, economic and social values do not reflect standards of faith. Quite likely, it will be filled by those who claim religious people have no right to assert their opinions about the public good.

This would represent an epic loss, not simply for people of faith, but for the nation as a whole.

Believe it or not—and partisans from the poles of the political parties do not—some Americans affiliate with both the Republican and Democratic parties precisely because of their faith.

This is most obvious with the Republicans, whose political base has been bolstered by evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics more than four decades. As even casual observers know, many of these voters are motivated by two faith-fueled positions—eliminating abortion and opposing same-sex marriage. These are the headline issues that grab national attention as they galvanize a huge cohort of voters.

Some Republicans likewise vote as they do because their small-government political philosophy reflects their religious views regarding thrift, stewardship and individual responsibility.

Likewise, a significant number of Democrats follow their spiritual consciences into the voting booth. They champion support for the poor, the disadvantaged and the otherwise marginalized because they believe Jesus and the prophets commanded them to look out for “the least” among society.

Some Democrats also vote as they do because they believe Jesus commanded them to be “salt” and “light,” and so they should use their influence—on the ballot and on the public square—to encourage society to care for the underdogs.

### **Needed voices**

A significant number of Christian Republicans can't believe a pro-choice Democrat who affirms same-sex marriage can be a Christian. And some Christian Democrats have a hard time understanding how a Republican who supports laws and policies that hurt poor people, children, the elderly and the chronically ill can be a Christian, either.

The truth is Christian Republicans and Democrats vote exactly as they do precisely because of how they read the Bible. To the consternation of the other, both parties need them—not for their voting power, but for their conscience.

Even when they disagree—perhaps especially when they disagree—people of faith bring a badly needed perspective to their political parties. They remind their colleagues politics is not simply about power, economics, philosophy and elections. Their presence speaks to the transcendence of moral principle, of speaking up for values.

This is true, even though it is paradoxical. Principled conservative and liberal people of faith bring value to their political parties. Sometimes, they yield to the temptation to put party ahead of principle. But across the longer arc of time, they point beyond expediency to virtue.

America needs people of robust faith involved in politics. If either party throws them out—and don't kid yourself; it could happen in both parties—their voices will not be heard in the public square, calling for transcendent values.

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