

UMB News

Steele Heartened by Election, Sees ‘Vibrancy’

November 6, 2020 | By [Lou Cortina](#)

Red state vs. blue state. Republican vs. Democrat. Rural voter vs. urban voter.

The political dividing lines in the United States have been reinforced by the 2020 election results, but Michael Steele, JD, sees voter turnout and the probable outcome of the nation’s most important race providing opportunities to moderate the discourse and move beyond the discord.

“It was so heartening to see 101 million Americans cast their votes before Nov. 3,” the former Maryland lieutenant governor and one-time chairman of the Republican National Committee said as the guest for the University of Maryland, Baltimore’s (UMB) latest President’s Panel on Politics and Policy, held virtually Nov. 5. “And then the turnout on Election Day tells me that there’s still a vibrancy in America regarding who we are and what we want to be, despite what the red-and-blue electoral map might look like.

“President Donald Trump has filled up every waking moment and conversation we have, but he’s not going to be on the TV screen every day as president, and he’s not going to be on the front page of the newspaper every day as president,” added Steele, predicting Trump is likely to lose when all the votes are counted. “So if nothing else, this election allows us to return to a space where we can have conversations about something other than one politician or president. And I think that’s healthy.”

Steele, who also [headlined this UMB speaker series](#) in February during the presidential primaries, returned to offer his insights on the results of the race between Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden. Steele took questions from UMB President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, and audience members, touching on his endorsement of Biden, the inaccuracy of pre-election polls, political division among families, and more.

Jarrell introduced Steele and later thanked him for the message he’s relayed to UMB during both panel appearances about the importance of voting, being a responsible citizen, and participating in the political process.

“You also reminded us that the United States remains a beacon of freedom in the world, and I certainly have not forgotten those words,” Jarrell said. “The bottom-line lesson from what you’ve said is that we citizens are the ultimate check on our government. I agree that we must make sure that our voices are heard.”

Steele, who’s also an MSNBC political analyst, raised his voice figuratively Oct. 20 by endorsing Biden in an [op-ed for NBCNews.com](#) that began with “I am an American, a conservative and a Republican, in that order. And I am voting for Joe Biden on Nov. 3.” Steele said he based his decision on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic, the health of the economy, and the national civil unrest over systemic racism.

“Trust me, there’s no upside to bucking your party, but I love my country,” Steele said. “And in my assessment of the character of President Trump and the quality of his leadership on those three issues, I concluded that he wasn’t up to the job.”

Further explaining why he supported Biden, Steele told a story from his 2006 run for the U.S. Senate and how several Democratic officeholders from Prince George’s County endorsed him in the race against Ben Cardin, JD ’67. Steele said one of the Democrats wrestled with the decision because of her opposing view on abortion.

“We talked about the issue, and the conversation ended in a stalemate,” said Steele, who is anti-abortion. “But a few days later she called me up and said, ‘This isn’t about one issue; this isn’t about politics. This is about you; this is about leadership.’ And she said, ‘I think you’re a leader we need in Maryland, so I’m going to stand with my colleagues and endorse you.’”

“That just changed my heart in so many ways I can’t even begin to describe it, because she made a political sacrifice for me,” said Steele, who lost the race to Cardin. “So in my endorsement of Joe Biden, I was more concerned about my country than policy or politics. And what animated me to make that decision was that moment from 2006. So I thought, ‘This is where I pay it forward.’”

Moving forward, in looking at how a potential Biden administration would work with Republicans if they retain control of the Senate, Steele said he’s optimistic there will be cooperation because the urgency of COVID-19 and pandemic-induced economic challenges demand action from Congress. He says Biden’s and running mate Kamala Harris’ history in the Senate and the relationships they’ve formed in that body will be critical to deal-making between the parties.

“I’m not going to say there won’t be stalemates,” Steele said. “But Washington primarily works off of relationships. And if you don’t have relationships, you’ve got to build them. Because Joe Biden and Kamala Harris come from the Senate and have relationships with a lot of Republican leaders, that’s going to be a benefit for the country.”

Regarding pollsters’ failures in the 2020 election cycle, Steele said polling firms have still not figured out how to approach or address Trump voters with their survey questions, which he said are often seen as biased or judgmental. He described these voters as under-represented, misrepresented, and largely forgotten.

“There is a wide swath of American voters who, for whatever reason, the pollsters just discount,” Steele said. “Donald Trump won Florida by 200,000 votes more than he did in 2016. Where did those votes come from? How did pollsters not know they were there? Our politics are like any living organism in that they change and they evolve. The polling system needs to catch up with that evolution.”

In that vein, an audience member asked Steele about how Trump voters and Biden voters within their families can get along, particularly with Thanksgiving gatherings approaching this month.

“We should never allow anyone to come between us and our kin,” Steele replied. “No one outside the family should ever stand between you and your mother, you and your son or daughter, you and your wife or husband. The fact that we’ve allowed our politics and the personality of one man to do that is dangerous and unfortunate. We have to break that cycle.”

“We can’t carry Donald Trump’s baggage into our homes anymore. And this Thanksgiving, hopefully, it’ll be a lot less noisy. You’ll be fighting over drumsticks, not some tweet by Donald Trump.”

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