



PLAYBOOK DEEP DIVE

Rancher raised Republican now battles right-wing GOP

For this week's episode of Playbook Deep Dive, we sat down with Jennifer Ellis at her cattle ranch in eastern Idaho to understand how the state's GOP establishment delivered a stinging rebuke to Trumpism.



Lieutenant Governor of Idaho Janice McGeachin gives a media interview during the Republican Party 2022 primary celebration in Boise, Idaho, Tuesday, May 17, 2022. | Kyle Green/AP Photo

By **RYAN LIZZA**

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Jennifer Ellis is the face of the movement that handed Donald Trump his biggest defeat of the year. She leads Take Back Idaho, a political action committee founded last year to beat back the growing tide of extremist candidates in Idaho.

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Ellis's main target on Tuesday was Janice McGeachin, the state's far-right lieutenant governor, whom Trump backed in her gubernatorial primary challenge to incumbent Gov. Brad Little.

Trump's candidate lost by almost 21 points.

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Of the candidates that Take Back Idaho supported, 30 of 44 won their primaries

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“I’m not saying that that was us that did that, because they were substantially great candidates. They ran great campaigns,” said Ellis.

“We just augmented where we could, you know, with a coalition of other folks. I mean, we had Ag, we had business, we had firemen, we had police. We had just a really amazing coalition that all helped in that same direction.”

In a state with a short 3-month legislative session, Ellis said Idaho politics used to be a relatively low-key affair.

“In a state as small as Idaho, you work with your elected officials really close. You know ‘em all. And to a large extent, until the last 15 years, probably a whole lot of them. You’d be at meetings in the off season with [the legislators], so they became friends. You knew their families, you knew who they were as people and what they’d fight for as elected officials for us.”

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But at some point, Ellis said she noticed a dramatic shift within the Republican party.

“When I started seeing this name calling. People that I knew were very, very conservative in their personal lives and in their policy making started getting called RINOs and I kind of thought, ‘What’s that? That’s coming from inside the party.’”

Ellis' thoughts on Lt. Governor Janice McGeachin's courting of militia groups and white supremacist activists.

“She didn’t just jump the shark, she ate it on the way over. I mean, far right is one thing. Alt-right is a whole other thing.”

Which direction is this fight between the far-right and moderates headed? And who’s got the upper hand right now?

“I think there are so many bigger concerns than who Trump wants,” said Ellis. “In a state like ours, we’ve got a lot of challenges. We’ve got drought. We’ve got wildfire season coming. We have got infrastructure that needs to be rebuilt. I mean, we have real world problems, not political problems. And we need grownups to fix them. And that’s the folks that we tried to get elected. So I think it’s a waning influence over time.”

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