

ENDANGERED SPECIES |

The fall of the Kansas moderate Republicans from the view of Ron Freeman

By Jeff Chapman - Contributing writer - The Manhattan Mercury - Jul 26, 2025 Updated Sep 1, 2025



Ron Freeman, whom many in Manhattan may know as the father of NFL quarterback and K-State legend, Josh Freeman, but I know as the former head of the Kansas Republican Party from the early 2000s.

I first met Ron while assisting on a campaign for a former Mayor of Manhattan. We have become friends and have chatted about millions of topics. NFL head injuries, race relations from the perspective of a black Republican from Missouri, K-State sports in general and of course politics.

Chapman: Ron let's focus today on your time leading the Kansas Republican party. How did you find that role or did it find you?

Freeman: At the time, Tim Shallenberger was the Chair of the party, and he identified that the party was split into factions. Tim knew me from the past, so he reached out.

Chapman: You were heavily involved in politics previously in Missouri:

Freeman: Yes. I ran unsuccessfully for U.S. Congress in 1994 and garnered over 40% of the vote in what was and still is a very Democratic Party stronghold, the seat held now by Emanuel Cleaver II.

Chapman: And a strong Dole Supporter too?

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Freeman: Yes, I was a GOP Delegate for Bob Dole for President in 1996 at the convention in San Diego.

Chapman: How does a guy from Missouri get the job as the Executive Director of the Kansas Republican Party?

Freeman: Tim (Shallenberger) wanted a person from the outside, not influenced by the moderates, the conservatives, or the Tea Party ultra-conservatives at the time. I was just a regular big tent Republican.

Chapman: Several times in history certain party leaders on the national level have brought all ideologies and factions together under one roof, like Teddy Roosevelt in his first term, or Nixon.

Freeman: Yes, and more recently Ronald Reagan was highly successful getting those with disagreements, even from the other parties, to work together for the common good.

Chapman: Do you feel the same about Trump?

Freeman: I do in the fact that here is a guy who has been tarred and feathered, yet he has drawn people in from the working class, unions, minorities, independents, and other parties, because he is not afraid to work with other people who think differently. It's harder to see this today because of the negativity and polarization that comes with Trump, but his intention is to work with everyone, in my opinion.

Chapman: Back to Kansas, you assumed the position in 2006 as the GOP ED, and what happened?

Freeman: I learned very quickly that there was a lot of passion in the party. People were very personal in their ideologies and felt defensive of the idea of working with others who may think differently in all the factions. I won't mention any names or point any fingers, because it was nearly everyone who either felt personally attacked or wanted to attack anyone who thought differently on all issues.

Chapman: This division in the Kansas Republican party was already there, but there seemed to be a stronger movement at the time to move more to the right. The period I like to refer to as creating an endangered species, the moderate Kansas Republican.

Freeman: Ha, yes. My whole intention and focus was to elect the Republican nominees in the general election, so I tried to avoid the primary battles, or taking sides. Finding balance was my process and it was not always well received.

Chapman: Were you being attacked? Were they trying to throw you out?

Freeman: Yes and no. Once people understood what I was doing it was more acceptable, but I wish they understood it before the primaries instead of after. I got letters and messages of complaint such as, "How can you support that liberal guy?" or "She's way too conservative." But many of those very same people and others sent me thank you letters and apologies.

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Chapman: Apologies?

Freeman: Yes, for not being team players and not supporting the overall effort to promote all Republicans, not just the ones who agreed with them on every issue.

Chapman: What would you have done differently or what advice would you give a person taking on that role?

Freeman: That's an interesting question, but a good one. I would have liked to have communicated with all the county chairs and leaders across the state, in person, by phone or, however, to share the vision and expectations of working together under one tent. I wish I had done that first instead of later.

Chapman: You probably assumed that message had already been delivered.

Freeman: Yes, I spent a lot of time, defending myself as being this unknown guy from another state going around telling leaders what to do, and it was evident that if we had done a better roll out with all the key leaders to get them on board, there may have been less division. I say that again because of all the apologies and thankyou's I got, after I was out of the position.

Chapman: Do you think that was when the party ideology shifted?

Freeman: It definitely took a hard right after I left and has been there mostly since. For instance, I don't think someone like Bob Dole could be nominated by the Kansas Republican Party today, because he liked to work with other on all sides, and today's GOP considers that unacceptable.

Chapman: The Kansas Republican Party today has a veto proof legislature, which allows for easier passage of ideas without as much legislation or debate or input from other sides. Do you think that is a positive or a negative?

Freeman: That is merely a result of what the voters of Kansas have chosen. They have chosen this large majority of conservative representation, and the legislature is playing by the rules. It's no more or less negative than without the majority. It's really up to the voters of Kansas to decide how they want to be represented, so I would not say having a veto proof majority is bad, unless something was done to negatively affect Kansas.

Chapman: True, and they have also chosen a Governor from the Democratic Party, which has balanced things for the most part.

Freeman: Yes, I always say that if the decisions are making things better then it's working.

Chapman: Wouldn't you agree that the Republicans in Kansas or Missouri or nationally would be more affective if they accepted differences rather than alienating those who think differently?

Freeman: Yes, in every era when all sides worked together the leadership and effectiveness was better and less polarizing across the board. It's hard to say if that is even possible in today's political climate.

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