

IS THE GAP SO GREAT BETWEEN RETRO RED AND METRO BLUE?

In his 2004 book *The Great Divide: Retro vs. Metro* by John Sperling puts the lie to a typical conservative claim that people live in Blue States because of government handouts there. Regardless of where the dole is handed out, no more than six percent of Americans were ever on Aid to Dependent Children, the main federal welfare program.

Now an 83-year-old billionaire, John Sperling grew up in a Christian fundamentalist home, but this life was turned around when he met left-wing sailors in the merchant marine. A non-reader in high school, he overcome his academic deficiencies and became a professor of history at Ohio State University. He is best known for founding the on-line University of Phoenix.

Sperling sums up his thesis as follows: "Retro America is made up of 25 states where low wages, subsidies, religious zealotry and social rigidity trump diversity, innovation and educational and scientific achievement," which dominate in the blue states.

Here are some of Sperling's main points:

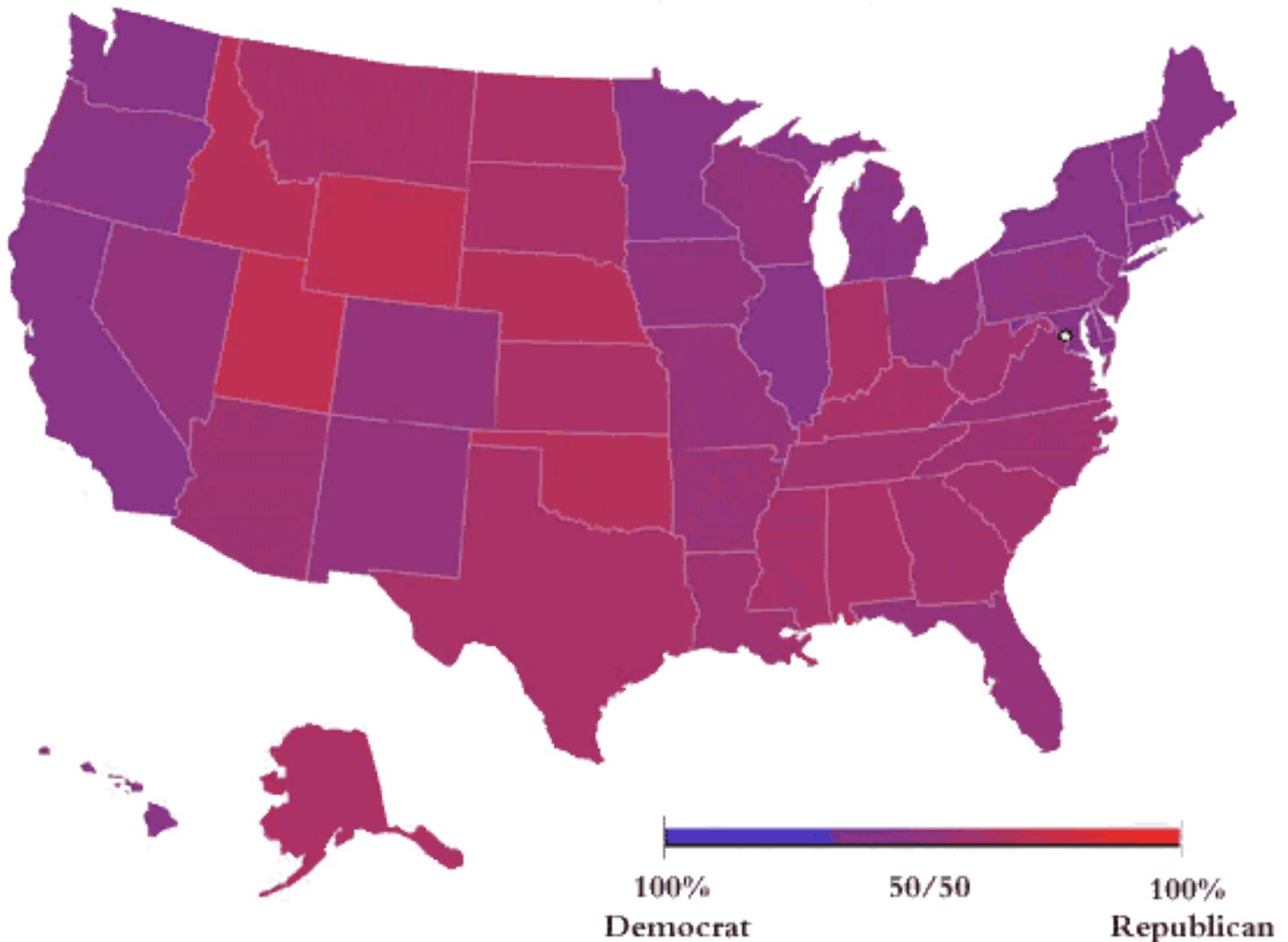
- The Red States have 35 percent of the population, while the Blue States have 65 percent.
- Subsidized industries (agriculture, oil, gas, etc.) dominate in the Red States and nonsubsidized manufacturing, financial and information services dominate in the Blue States.
- The Metros pay 29 percent of federal tax while the Retros pay 71 percent.
- From 1991 to 2001 the Reds received \$800 billion more in goods, services, and cash from the feds than it paid in taxes, while the Blues paid the feds \$1.4 trillion.
- The Retros have produced only 23 Nobel Laureates in science and economics, while the Metros have given us 235.

Sperling published his book before the 2004 election, but it is significant to note that 39 states gave Kerry 1.5 million more votes than Bush, while 11 southern and thoroughly red states (the heart of the Confederacy) gave 5 million more votes to Bush.

Conservatives point out that if you paint the U.S. by counties the red will totally dominate the isolated blue urban areas, but this exaggerates the

cultural divide as much as Sperling does. If we color the states by the ratio of Republican and Democrat votes, most states will come out as shades of purple. This confirms polls that show that Americans prefer moderate candidates, not those on the blue left or the red right.

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Alan Wirzbicki, writing for the *New Republic*, points out other flaws in Sperling's book. If big business is the enemy of metro liberals, why is it

that most big corporations are found in the blue states? Sperling also fudges in his neat division of 25 blues and 25 reds. Initially, Tennessee came out blue, but Sperling forced it back onto the red list, because even though it was metro economically, it was retro culturally and religiously.

Most of Sperling's economic statistics, however, are compelling and conservatives have to admit that many of their kind have been feeding at the federal trough far more than any poor American has. Nevertheless, to exaggerate the cultural divide more than it should be plays right into the view that pointy-headed liberal elites are out to get conservative Americans. Democrats will continue to lose elections if Sperling and Al Franken have their way and make this problem worse for them.