

Joseph Smith for President

Claim: Joseph Smith once ran for President of the United States.

Status: Confirmed

Joseph Smith was indeed a candidate for the office of President of the United States in 1844. The following is from the book *Church History in the Fullness of Times*, copyright 1989 by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, pp. 269-270:

While apostasy festered in Nauvoo in late 1843, the Prophet Joseph Smith was busy politically. Realizing that 1844 was a national election year, he wrote letters to John C. Calhoun, Lewis Cass, Richard M. Johnson, Henry Clay, and Martin Van Buren, the men most frequently mentioned as candidates for president of the United States. He asked each man what his course would be toward the Latter-day Saints if he were elected, especially in helping them obtain redress for property lost in Missouri. Of the five, Cass, Clay, and Calhoun responded by letter, but none proposed the kind of federal intervention that the Prophet and the Church members desired.

It seemed obvious that there was no one the Saints could endorse for the presidency. Therefore, Joseph Smith met with the Twelve on 29 January 1844 to consider their course for the coming elections. The brethren unanimously sustained a motion to propose their own ticket with Joseph Smith as their candidate for president. He told them that they would have to send every man in Nauvoo who could speak in public to campaign and preach the gospel and that he would be among them. "After the April Conference we will have General Conferences all over the nation, and I will attend as many as convenient. Tell the people we have had Whig and Democratic Presidents long enough: we want a President of the United States. If I ever get into the presidential chair, I will protect the people in their rights and liberties."

With the help of William W. Phelps, John M. Bernhisel, and Thomas Bullock, Joseph synthesized his ideas for a platform into a pamphlet entitled *General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States*. It was published on 7 February and mailed to about two hundred leaders in the country. Joseph's proposals were designed to appeal to voters in both major parties. He advocated revoking imprisonment for debt, turning prisons into seminaries of learning, abolishing slavery by 1850 and reimbursing slaveholders out of revenue from the sale of public lands, establishing a national bank with branches in each state, and annexing Texas and Oregon. Joseph Smith's first choice as his vice-presidential running mate was the prominent New York journalist and friend of the Saints, James Arlington Bennet. Bennet declined, however, and Joseph finally settled on Sidney Rigdon.

On 11 March 1844 a council meeting was held in Nauvoo to organize the political kingdom of God in preparation for the second coming of Christ. Now that the Prophet was a candidate for high political office, the time seemed right to inaugurate this body which would also serve as a committee to direct his campaign. The council consisted of about

fifty members, including most of the Church leaders. It therefore came to be known as the Council of Fifty.

By the end of April, a list of elders and their campaign assignments was published in the Nauvoo Neighbor. It was also decided, in an early May convention held in Nauvoo, to secure the appointment of delegates from several states to a national convention to be held in Baltimore, Maryland, in July to nominate Joseph Smith for president of the United States.

The following is from "[The American Presidency and the Mormons](#)" by James B. Allen, Assistant Church Historian, *Ensign*, Oct. 1972, 47.

Undoubtedly his [Joseph Smith] experience with national politicians who would not commit themselves to the exercise of federal power in behalf of the Saints was one of the factors that induced Joseph Smith to declare his own candidacy for the office of president in 1844. Prior to his decision he wrote several possible contenders, asking what their course of action toward the Saints would be if elected, and none of them sent satisfactory replies. Finally, after consultation with the Twelve Apostles and other leaders in Nauvoo, he announced his candidacy and prepared a pamphlet entitled Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States. (7. See DHC, vol. 6, pp. 197-209.)

In this document, which was taken by the missionaries to various parts of the United States, Joseph Smith expressed his feelings on most important issues of the day except his desire to add to the powers granted the federal government. This may have been an effort to demonstrate that he was truly aware of national problems and would not use the office of president merely to promote the interest of the Saints. Among other things he called for prison reform, abolition of slavery, economy in government, a national bank, and territorial expansion.

Unfortunately, the Prophet did not live to see the outcome of the election, for he was brutally martyred in June. In the end, the presidency was narrowly won by James K. Polk, the Democratic candidate, who ran on a platform calling for American expansion.