

Court rules parties may open primaries

Last week the Supreme Court ruled that the Connecticut Legislature could not limit a party from allowing independent voters to vote in the party's primary. The decision, approved 5-4 by the court, is a good one, and protects political parties' right to association provided in the Constitution.

The court's decision did not hinge on whether it is a good idea for independents to vote in party primaries, but rather on whether a state can tell the party that it can or can't include independent voters.

However, open primaries, which allow independents to vote in party primaries, do increase voter participation by giving independents greater say in what candidates will be selected for the general election, and the input of independents can act as a moderating influence on a party.

The Connecticut Republican party, whose membership is outnumbered by independents as well as Democrats in the state, had been seeking to amend a 1955 Connecticut law requiring closed primaries; the amendment would have allowed independents to vote in the Republican primary. The Democrat-controlled Legislature rejected the proposal.

Later, when Republicans took control of the Legislature, the Democratic mayor vetoed a bill that would have allowed open primaries.

The court's decision asserted that independent voters need not make a "public act of affiliation" with the party to vote in the party's primary. This assertion does not mean that all parties must allow independents to vote in their primaries, nor does it mean that Democrats can vote in Republican primaries.

Rather, it comes as a victory for independents, who will have greater access to the election process, and for parties who wish to open the process to independents.

Some argue that this ruling weakens the meaning of party primaries because people not affiliated with the party can take part in choosing the party's candidates. In Connecticut, of course, this is a particular concern, since independents actually outnumber Republicans and could conceivably control the party's primaries.

However, the court held that it is not the state's job to "protect the party's integrity against the party itself." Moreover, if the threat of "watering down" primaries comes on behalf of increasing voter participation, it is well worth the risk.

Independent voters under a closed primary system face only the choice of candidates presented to them as the result of primaries from which they are excluded.

If a party desires the input of independents, perhaps even in hopes of attracting them to their party, then such input should not be limited by the state.

Moderate-to-liberal Republican forces in Connecticut support the push for open primaries, including Sen. Lowell Weicker, who often clashes with conservative forces in the national party. These Republicans are seeking to suit their party to the needs of the large independent population in Connecticut.

Such a move is admirable because it comes as an invitation to a large portion of the population of Connecticut to participate in the electoral process early on. The Supreme Court was correct to affirm the party's right to make such a move.



Letters

Expansion

Why should property owners pay for an airport expansion (ODE editorial, Dec. 11)?

Like sales taxes and the lottery, property taxes are regressive. That means those who can afford it least pay the most. What's more, many property owners (including limited income folks) rarely fly.

In time of hardship, why even consider such expansion? Business and tourists don't come to Lane County to examine a paved field north of town. That's an insult to the Emerald Valley.

Should the economy boom again, let the airport grow with it. But not at the sole expense of property owners.

Eric Nill
International studies

Nasty brew

In response to Clint Kaster's letter concerning the dim memory responsible for ODE's Dec. 5 editorial, may I plead guilty to a similarly affected memory?

I do recall what Watergate was all about: the break-in, as committed by Republican loyalists, into the Democratic National Headquarters. Retrospectively, Nixon's blunder seems a classic to be

entered into the "political science hall of fame."

I'm curious, though; didn't he merely get his hand caught in the same "cookie jar" many former presidents had had their hands in? Does the fact he got caught make him unique?

Mr. Kaster, is there not a huge difference between the Iranian arms deal (and subsequent funneling of huge sums of money to the Contras) and the Watergate break-in? Do not international security crimes cause Watergate to "pale in comparison"?

Do you have a direct line to Washington? What makes you so certain Mr. Reagan will come clean? Do you not question his attempt to surround himself with such polished liars as Donald Regan, Edwin Meese and (the now-defunct double-talker) Admiral Poindexter? Whoops! By calling them polished liars, I've committed libel. I amend that to read "polished information arrangers."

As much as I like Michael J. Fox, it is disconcerting to note that Alex Keaton is alive and well at the University. Wake up, Alex, er... Clint. There's something nasty brewing in the Reagan administration that's going to put Watergate where it should have been in the first place — on the back shelf, collecting dust.

Kristi Svendsen
Pre-journalism

Front page

I understand that newspapers are the mark of a free society. They should remain unabridged

Mark Anzalone
Journalism

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Letters to the editor must be limited to 250 words, typed, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is turned in. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style. Letters to the editor should be turned into the Emerald office, Suite 300, EMU.

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