

Coming Out Day wields personal, political power

■ **OUR OPINION:** This national event contributes to the fight for gay rights

National Coming Out Day has become a rallying point for gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the last decade. Organizers designed the event to counteract the feeling of isolation many young lesbian and gay people endure in an overtly heterosexual world.

The campaign has worked, and each Oct. 11, thousands of non-heterosexual people leave their shame and fear in the closet and declare who they are to their families, friends and co-workers.

As liberating as that moment is for the individual, the event indirectly wields more political power than Gay Pride Day or the March on Washington in 1993.

Coming Out Day speaks to the people.

Each time a gay man or lesbian comes out, it forces his or her family to see gay-rights issues in a different light; it increases the number of Americans who know and love someone who is gay or lesbian.

Suddenly, gay people stop being one of *them*, and they become one of us.

For politicians, popularity equals power. As more people come out, more Americans are less likely to believe the anti-gay rhetoric spewed from their televisions and mailboxes.

Coming Out Day has been responsible, in part, for the increased political and social power of non-heterosexual people in the past decade. That power will play a part in the U.S. Supreme Court's decision

on the constitutionality of Colorado's Amendment 2.

Amendment 2 succeeded in repealing all city gay-rights ordinances in that state and prohibited any future laws that would extend civil-rights protection to lesbians and gays. Tuesday, the Court heard opening arguments on this case, and its decision could affect anti-gay rights initiatives across the country.

The amendment passed in Colorado because of fear and ignorance. It passed because not enough gays and lesbians stepped forward and said, "Mom, Dad, I am gay, and I am not the enemy."

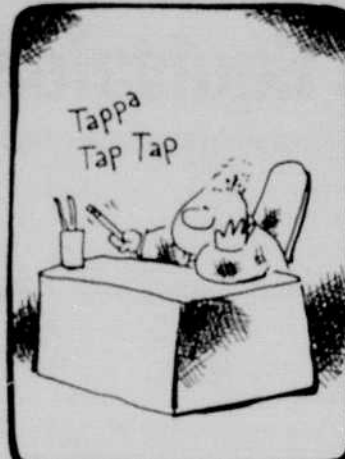
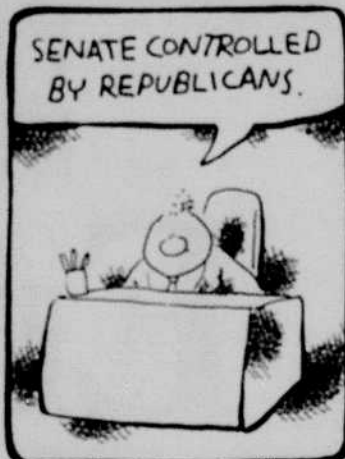
By coming out, non-heterosexual people educate all of us, and perhaps more importantly, they make it easier for the next generation of gays and lesbians to acknowledge who they are without the fear of being unloved.

Almost 20 years ago, the first openly gay elected official in this country, Harvey Milk, gave this challenge to gay and lesbian people:

"Every gay person *must* come out. As difficult as it is, you must tell your immediate family, you must tell your relatives, you must tell your friends if indeed they are your friends, you must tell your neighbors, you must tell the people you work with, you must tell the people at the stores you shop in.

"And once they realize that we are indeed their children, that we are indeed everywhere — every myth, every lie, every innuendo will be destroyed once and for all. And once, once you do, you will feel so much better."

It is just as true today.



OPINION

U.S. on verge of getting third party

A few weeks ago on CNN's Larry King Live, Texas billionaire and sometime politician H. Ross Perot made an announcement that could dramatically alter the American electoral scene for some time. That evening, he announced the formation of a new political organization, The Independence Party.

This group is planning to elect a candidate for only one position, the Presidency of the United States. As Perot told *Time* after his announcement, the new party is going to "build a war chest of \$60 million at least." Why does it need such a large pot? So that the candidate "won't have to go out with a tambourine and beg the special interests for money."

This turn of events begs the following question: Is America ready for a third party?

According to a recent *Time/CNN* poll of 1,000 adults, 54 percent of respondents said that they believed the formation of the Independence Party is "good for the country."

This number, while not astonishingly high, is large enough to indicate that among a majority of Americans there is a genuine dissatisfaction with the current two-party system.

Why is this? Let's take a look at each side.

The Republicans are great at cutting Medicare and Welfare for the elderly and the poor. On the other hand, when it comes to subsidies for rich farmers and business people, they aren't so frugal. This hypocrisy has not gone unnoticed by the voting public, as Bob Dole will discover when primary season begins.

Then, there's the Democrats, who have let not only the Republican party beat them in election season, but have let their own internal struggles cause an ideological standstill. The Democrats, as *Newsweek* columnist Joe Klein wrote, "are a mess. They have no organizing philosophy; they are a dwindling collection of fads and factions, most of which are anathema to the American middle." The important thing to remember here is that the "middle" in question is what can make or break an election, and that this is where Perot will attempt to position his candidate.

One problem that the new venture may have is its lack of definition. Simply because the two major parties are not working doesn't necessarily mean that voters disenchanted with them will all fit into one category. Thus far, the only issues that Perot has mentioned are that the Republicans and the Democrats are both "special interest parties," meaning that lobbying influence must be curbed, and that the federal

budget needs to be balanced.

Aside from that, it seems that anything goes. As *Newsweek* reported on the group's first gathering in San Diego, "there was just as much support in the crowd for Pat Buchanan and Jesse Jackson as there was for Powell and Perot." It is quite likely that the same consensus problems that have struck the two major parties could affect the Perot movement as well.

This brings up another point: who will the Independence Party elect as its candidate? Obviously, the first name brought up is Colin Powell, who has expressed some reservations about working with Perot. Others mentioned have been retiring Senator Bill Bradley (D-N.J.), former Connecticut Governor Lowell Wicker (one of the few people who has actually won a major office as an independent), and of course, Ross Perot himself.

But, after Perot helped Clinton win the White House in 1992, the public has not seen him as a political maverick, but a disruption. According to the previously mentioned *Time/CNN* poll, only 27 percent of respondents said that they would like to see Perot run as the Independence Party's candidate, and remember, that's 27 percent who would like to see him as a candidate, not who would necessarily vote for him.

The Independence Party, if it wishes to be a true power, must do its utmost to distance itself from the ornery Texan. The voting public will never forget his cartoonish fight against NAFTA; his delusions about a Republican conspiracy to break up his daughter's wedding; his entrance, exit and re-entrance in the race or the rest of his buffoonery during the 1992 election. If the movement is to succeed, he must allow another candidate, a Powell or a Bradley, to take the helm, and more importantly, the nomination for the 1996 presidential election.

The American people are starving for another answer in politics, a group or a person who can truly break the cycle of lobbying, over-burdened taxation, overzealous spending and ideological inconsistency, which is now the norm in both of the major parties. Let's hope that the Independence Party will attempt to be a truly new and unique political organization with real solutions and a true sense of leadership, not just a vehicle for Ross Perot's ego.

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