

Why Free Elections Matter

Paul Damian Wells
3/12/2016

1 BIG TENTS

When I first started voting 3 decades ago, the two major parties were called “big tents”. Both parties strived to include as many voters and diverse political groups as possible, and there was actually a significant overlap between the two parties. Most voters are “centrists” and can just as easily vote Republican as Democrat. For many years, this is exactly what took place - half of centrists voted Republican, and half voted Democrat. Government at all levels worked because centrist voters and the candidates they supported cooperated across party lines.

2 ROE VS. WADE AND THE REAGAN DEMOCRATS

In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an “implied” constitutional right to abortion existed. This enraged “religious” voters across the country. So much so - that a new “religious” political group was created.

In 1980, the Republican candidate for president deliberately pandered to this group and was successful in drawing many religious Democrats to vote Republican. Since then, religious voters have continued to migrate to the Republican Party and now dominate in many parts of the country. As a result, the Republican Party is no longer a “big tent”.

3 EVERY ACTION HAS AN EQUAL AND OPPOSITE REACTION

The collapse of the Republican “big tent” is distressing, but the rapid decline of the Democratic Party is even more alarming. The loss of religious voters to the Republican Party upset the balance of political power. Democrats could have countered this loss by reaching out to disaffected centrist voters. Instead, Democrats turned to special interest politics - legislating privileges, spending or tax breaks for political groups and corporations that could muster significant voters or money. This practice necessarily excludes any voter outside these groups. As a result, the Democratic Party is no longer a “big tent” either.

4 THE RISE OF INDEPENDENTS

As the two major parties entrenched themselves progressively farther and farther from the political center, centrist voters became increasingly frustrated and started dropping out of both parties. Unfortunately with each centrist voter that dropped out, the remaining centrist voters were outnumbered in their respective party just that much more - pushing each major party even farther off center. This forced even more centrist voters to drop out, and so on.....

The situation has deteriorated to the point that almost 1/3 of all voters in Oregon are now registered as Independent. Under Oregon law, it is de-facto illegal for centrist Independent voters to nominate candidates to public office, and centrist candidates, those capable of cooperating across party lines, simply cannot survive the closed partisan primary process.

5 NON-PARTISAN ELECTIONS

Some enterprising individuals would like us all to believe that the solution to this mess is yet another political party. There is a lot of money and power to be had if someone can come up with a party platform that can compete with Democrats and Republicans. The suggestion is absurd of course. Dividing the country even further along ideological lines will just make our problems progressively worse. (If two parties can't cooperate, why would three be better?)

Political parties are an indispensable part of politics. Nonetheless, if we mandate party membership, political parties become the root of the problem – not the solution. Like religion, political affiliation must be voluntary. Political parties and religious organizations naturally evolve over time, and these changes are not always positive or constructive. Political parties and religious organizations are always tempting targets for individuals with malicious intent.

Voters must be free to adopt or reject any political belief or platform as they see fit. The whole idea behind Democracy is the belief that the majority of voters will choose the best political agenda. (Most of the time - Not always.) Partisan elections must be abolished, along with any other statute or process that limits the ability of voters to adopt or reject political beliefs and agendas. The courts should never have allowed these practices in the first place.