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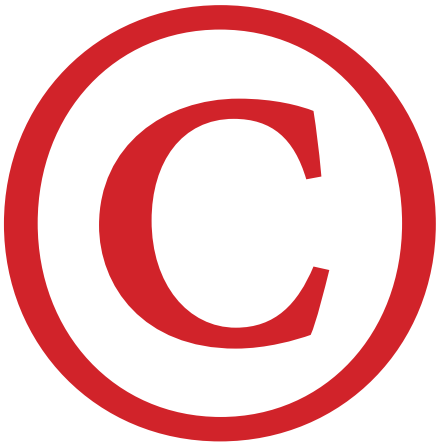

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Put Principle Over Strategy in Voting

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BY DAVID R. KELLER

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With the Nov. 5 General Election approaching, Utah voters again face the challenge of selecting a proper voting philosophy: Should one vote for the finest candidate, regardless of whether that candidate has any chance of winning, or vote for the least-worst of the candidates who do have a chance of winning, or vote according to social affiliation?

It is widely held that members of a particular social group should automatically vote a certain way -- Teamsters for Democrats, business owners for Republicans, environmentalists for Greens, Constitutionalists for Libertarians. This method allows one to cast votes without much investigation or reflection.

Ruling out this third option is easy, since it is based on a logical fallacy: the majority is sometimes wrong. It was once generally held, for example, that smoking does not cause lung disease. Just because a particular political party is favored by a certain community, there is no guarantee that a candidate from that party is in fact the most qualified leader.

Thus, if suffrage is predetermined by party affiliation, one might unwittingly end up endorsing an undesirable.

It is not clear that citizens of a particular social group can identity the "correct" party anyhow. On election day in November 2000, not long before his untimely death, eminent Mormon author Eugene England lamented the utter political impotence of Democrats in Utah, and remarked that many Mormons in Utah assume that to be a good Mormon, one must vote Republican.

However, Gene pointed out that Mormons on the East Coast tend to vote Democrat because helping the downtrodden through social programs is considered properly Christian. So even within the LDS community, there is no consensus on which party line to tow.

As illustrated by Ralph Nader's candidacy in the last presidential election, deciding between the first two alternatives is more difficult. Prior to the Florida ballot debacle, a debate raged amongst environmentalists and critics of corporate power whether to vote for Nader, whom many considered to be by far the most worthy candidate, or Al Gore, simply so George W. Bush wouldn't win.

The issue boiled down to voting on principle or strategy.

Now Bush is president, even people who unequivocally endorse Nader's agenda are still livid at him for supposedly taking votes from Gore and handing the victory to Bush. But this anger is seriously

misplaced.

Should candidates refrain from running so as to not upset the dynamics of the two-party system? Absolutely not. A democracy can function only if those who think they can positively contribute to making the world a better place are encouraged to participate in the political process by running for office.

The value of the Reform, Libertarian, and Green parties points to the appropriate philosophy of suffrage. Money props up the two-party system, consequently corrupting the democratic process. Unless citizens start voting on the basis of principle rather than strategy, there is no hope of getting beyond the artificial dualism of two-party politics.

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