

100,000 ways to upset voters

Published: Tuesday, April 5, 2011 3:03 PM PDT
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Reasonable voters could hash this thing over endlessly or at least until the next election and never agree. But that doesn't matter because the issue has been decided.

Idaho will have a closed primary.

Alright, this is not news. Judge Lynn Winmill made his decision on the lawsuit filed by the Republican Party back in March and, in issuing his decision, he decided that the Republicans were right.

Voters won't like it.

That's not to say they've paid much attention. They haven't. But when voters get their first taste of the closed primary, they are not going to be happy.

Here's what happened in a nutshell:

Some folks in the Republican Party got in a dither because they thought Democrats were crossing-over to vote in the Republican primary to screw things up for Republicans. The theory was that Democrats would vote for the weaker or less worthy of the Republican candidates in the Republican primary. In doing so, the Democrats would ensure the worst of the Republican candidates would get elected so the Republican Party and presumably, the state of Idaho, would suffer as a result.

Maybe.

But that just doesn't pass the sniff test.

Let's face it, Idaho Democrats are not very good at politics. In fact, they're worse than that. To suggest that Idaho Democrats who can't even elect Democrats are cagey enough to somehow manipulate Republican primaries for nefarious purposes just doesn't make much sense.

No matter.

Judge Winmill decided that primaries will be closed. That means when you vote in the primary election you have to register as a Democrat or Republican then get the appropriate ballot.

But it's worse than that.

Not only will voters be forced to register with one party or the other to vote in the primary election, their choice will be a matter of public record.

Idahoans will not like that.

In his decision, Judge Winmill determined that political parties have the right to determine with whom they want to associate. In essence, the primary election is a party process and political parties should be able to determine who can participate in their respective primaries. For the record, Judge Winmill's decision is similar to rulings over the similar issues in other states and is supported n mandated? n by the Supreme Court. So it's not as if Judge Winmill came up with an outlandish ruling on this.

But the logic does make one wonder.

If primary elections are a party process, that is - the means by which political parties selected their candidates and one that should not be polluted by non-party members - why don't the parties pay for them?

But even though there will be plenty of grumbling and griping, voters will get along with the new system. What will happen is voters will switch their party registration depending on which primary ballot has the local race of most interest. (Not to disparage members of the legislature, but typically it is elections for Sheriff that generate the most interest.)

So, thanks to the Republican Party, voters n most of whom are mad as hell at both Democrats and Republicans and don't want to be identified with either group n will have to claim to be a member of one or the other to vote in a primary.

But it's worse than that.

Last week the joint-finance committee voted to pay \$100,000 to the Republican Party to cover their costs of the lawsuit. That's \$100,000 of your tax money n in a year when the state is strapped for cash - to pay for a lawsuit with which 99% of voters disagree.

If Republicans are smart, they'll opt not to take the tax money. Even Idaho Democrats could make a campaign issue out of that.