

# OPINION

## Log Cabin Democrat

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### Party that's winning won't want game to change

Two proposed constitutional amendments that would change Arkansas elections were submitted to the secretary of state July 6, and, naturally, it didn't take long for the party that's been winning those elections to try to block them.

Both would have to be approved by the voters in November. One initiative by a group calling itself Arkansas Voters

First would create a commission of three Republicans, three Democrats and three others who would redraw congressional and state legislative lines after each census. Congressional lines now are drawn by the state Legislature, while state legislative lines are drawn by the governor, attorney general and secretary of state. All of those are controlled by Republicans after a century and a half of being controlled by Democrats.

The proposal's purpose is to prevent gerrymandering, where politicians from the majority party draw districts using squiggly lines to benefit themselves. Gerrymandering has existed almost since the country's founding, but modern technology has made it a science.

The other proposal by Open Primaries Arkansas would change elections in two ways. First, every candidate would be on the primary ballot, and the top four would advance. In the current system, the two parties hold separate primaries and the winners face each other in the general election. In November, voters would rank those top four candidates rather than selecting one. If no candidate wins a majority, then the last-place candidate's votes go to those voters' second-choice candidates. That process continues until one candidate has a majority.

This kind of system would make voters more comfortable voting for an independent or third party candidate, instead of feeling they must vote for the "lesser of two evils" lest the greater evil win. They could vote for the candidate they really like as their first choice and then vote for the lesser evil second.

Both efforts involve some of the same people in Arkansas. The signature-collecting process was funded by a Texas-based foundation that supports redistricting reform, the Action Now Initiative.

The proposals ran into immediate opposition from the state Republican Party, which finally started winning elections about a decade ago and will have a chance to redraw districts for the first time since the Civil War ended.

After the two groups each submitted about 100,000 signatures July 6, Arkansans for Transparency, a group with Republican connections, announced it was forming to oppose both efforts.

Then last week, Secretary of State John Thurston announced he would disqualify all the signatures for both because the collectors had "acquired" criminal background checks instead of "passing" them.

Is there a difference between "acquiring" and "passing"? The groups have filed suit to get on the ballot. These things always end up in court anyway.

State Republican Party Chairman Doyle Webb told Talk Business & Politics in its Sunday broadcast that his party would be challenging both efforts before the State Board of Election Commissioners. On that same appearance, the state Democratic Party chairman, Michael John Gray, was more supportive of the proposals. Six of the seven commissioners - Thurston is one of them - are Republicans.

On Wednesday, those commissioners voted to certify the legislative redistricting effort's ballot title but voted 5-1 - Thurston didn't vote - to disqualify the open primaries proposal, saying its ballot title is misleading. The only dissenting vote was the commission's only Democrat. This will end up in court, too.

I cannot judge everyone's sincerity here. I can say there are some things we should be mindful of. It would be natural for the party that's winning to oppose shaking up the system. It would be natural for some members of the party that's losing to want to shake it up (while others who have found a niche in the status quo would want to keep things the same, too).

Let's hope we at least get to vote on these proposals after debating them beforehand. Whether you're a staunch Republican or a yellow-dog Democrat, or neither, the citizens' first responsibility is not to pick a team and then cheer them on. It's to keep a watchful eye and make sure the game is played the right way - sometimes by enforcing the rules, and sometimes, if need be, by changing them.

#### FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

#### LETTERS POLICY

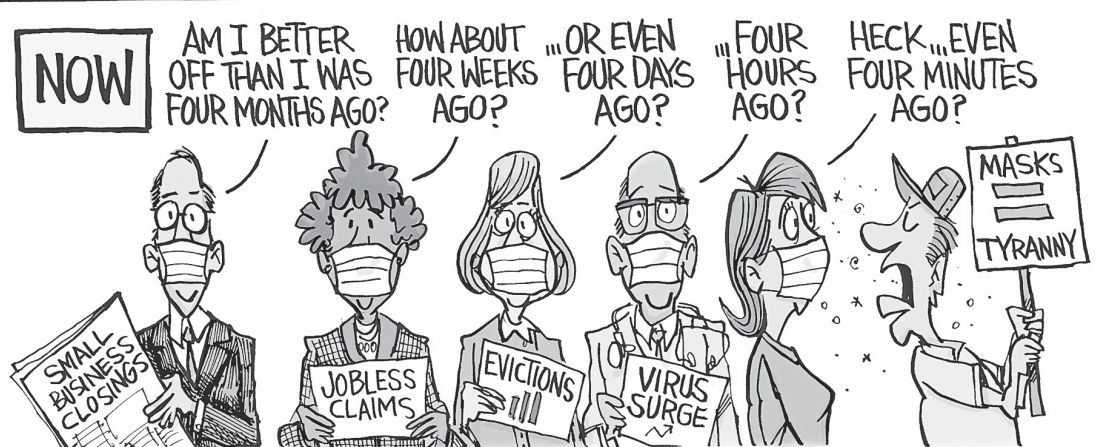
We want to hear from you. If you have a thought or an opinion about your city, your representation, your school or your local newspaper, we want to see it. And we want our readers to see it too.

#### How to send letters to the editor

Email: editorial@thecabin.net.  
 Mail: Log Cabin Democrat, 1121 Front Street, Conway, AR 72032

You can also drop your letter off at our office. Requirements are these: limit the letter to 400 words and keep those words suitable for print. Provide your name and contact information for verification. Only your name and city will be printed.

The Log Cabin Democrat reserves the right to edit all letters for space and content, but the editorial staff will never misrepresent the letter writer's views in the editing.



#### OUR VIEW

## The fourth star on the Arkansas flag should be removed

**Editor's note:** This editorial expresses the views of the Log Cabin Democrat. The editorial board is composed of Frank Leto, Jeanette Anderton and Alex Kienlen.

We state this simply: If Mississippi can strike its state flag in favor of a flag which does not honor its confederacy history, Arkansas can certainly remove its confederacy-supporting fourth star from the center of its flag.

The fourth star, the single star above the word "Arkansas," was first added in 1923 - this according to Arkansas Secretary of State John Thurston's website - to commemorate Arkansas being part of the Confederate States of America. Originally it was a fourth star in a line of stars but after a "furor," per Thurston, three stars were moved below the state's name with the single confederacy-sup-

porting star remaining above the word "Arkansas" at the flag's center.

We could go on as to the temperament of Arkansas, if not America, in the early 1920s and the thought process which would lead to the addition of the fourth star. We will note, however, that the 20s were also the time of the Ku Klux Klan's ascendancy in Arkansas and, yes, America. That fourth star reflects the "Who's in charge here" politics of that group and its brow-beating in that era.

And those white-supremacy politics are wrong, simply wrong.

We note further the "furor" moving three stars below the state's name and the single, then-new, star above is not without its own symbolism, that "Who's in charge here" being somehow above (above!) the name of the state is further not coincidental.

In fact to assert otherwise, that the fourth star, that the star's arrangement, doesn't mean anything or some other "No harm intended" response is so much whistling past the graveyard. The fourth star was put there in support of the confederacy. The fourth star was ultimately placed above the name of our very great state - and this is unacceptable.

Arkansas was formed by people who came, cleared a space on a wild American frontier and formed an identity. In time, and with statehood, a state flag was formed, the three stars in its center symbolic of its heritage leading to its formation. The fourth star, added 10 years after on our flag does not reflect heritage but instead the goals and schemes of those who would separate us, divide us. Those politics must not be honored.

The fourth star is not who we are; the fourth star must go.

## We need effective politicians, not busy ones

When I was a kid, my boss used to say, "do something, even if it is wrong." While my boss was generally a good manager, this saying was bad advice. Workers ended up doing activities that should not have been done, or doing tasks poorly. In either case, the workers wasted time and effort undoing their previous work, so they were too busy to do important work later. The workers also became so engaged in the fruitless pursuits that they were less likely to spot something that really needed to be done.

Unfortunately, President Trump and Congress seem to be actively implementing my old boss's advice. In the face of the pandemic, they want to appear to be doing something - anything, even if it is wrong, just so voters think they are putting some effort into solving the problem. The politicians probably hope voters won't pay close attention to what they are actually doing and just observe their busyness.

The federal government got busy right away. They sent checks to almost everyone who had filed federal income taxes during the last two years. Individuals got \$1,200; married couples got \$2,400; and additional payments went to families with children. With these payments, people who were thrown out of work received checks. This kind of targeted help is easy to justify - these people needed help. However, people who were still getting paid regu-

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larly also received checks. How can this be justified? Well, people with secure jobs will probably spend their stimulus checks. I know a family who will use this money to buy a new fence and another family who will use it to purchase new appliances. These purchases will do some good for the economy. The businesses that sell fences and appliances will generate more revenue; perhaps, enabling them to stay in business and keep their current workers employed. No doubt, these are good things. But, is this the best way for the government to be spending money? I think not. Much like my former coworkers should have thought about what tasks they should devote their time to, Congress and the president would have benefited the country if they had given more thought to how they should spend money. Now that they have borrowed so much money, the federal government may be unable to pay for other, more worthwhile, endeavors.

Instead of giving everyone a check, the government could have used this money to set up a system to test for the virus, purchasing all of the supplies and paying for all of the personnel necessary to establish a quick and efficient testing system. Now, without an efficient testing

system, people who get tested for the virus often have to wait a week for the results. During this week, they will frequently interact with others, since they will find it easy to tell themselves that they probably don't have the virus, but during their waiting period, they might be spreading it. If we had a system that allowed people to routinely receive their test results in 24 hours, people would quickly know when they present a danger to others and when they should definitely begin to self-quarantine.

An efficient testing system will drive down the infection rate in the U.S., much like they have in several East Asian countries and in Western Europe. If we can curtail the infection rate, people will start to feel safe, so they will engage in commerce. A low infection rate will provide a much greater stimulus to the economy than a government check to people who are still working.

My sense is that citizens need to start putting pressure on their elected officials. This approach has already worked during this pandemic. We did not get a mask mandate in Arkansas until newspaper Op-Eds and constituent complaints made it clear to elected officials that we do not want our politicians to just be busy; we want them to also be effective. Hopefully, potential voters can pressure our elected officials in Washington D.C. to spend money wisely, rather than just spending it to appear busy.