

Summary of Meeting with Andy Cilek

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437
Thursday, May 3, 2007

Thursday's discussion on potential election reform was vigorously delivered by Andy Cilek, founder and chairman of the Minnesota Voters Alliance, a seven person organization seeking to abolish nonpartisan elections throughout Minnesota and to challenge once again term limits for city elections. His two co-founders are Matt Marchetti, a communications major at the University of Minnesota and an employee of MN Revenue and Ph.D. Mike Degnan of the Philosophy department at the University of St. Thomas. Also, Ph. D. Terry Flower, a former member of the Metropolitan Council, sits on their advisory board. & ampn bsp

Verne Johnson, Chair, and Lee Canning, temporary note taker.

Here is the summary:

Present: Verne Johnson, chair; Lee Canning, Chuck Clay, Jim Hetland and Jim Olson (by phone)

Introduction – Verne introduced Andy Cilek, a native of St. Paul, who spent four years in the U.S. Marines and has studied at both the University of Minnesota and St. Thomas University. He works for an internet advertising company in Minnetonka and lives in Eden Prairie. He formed the Minnesota Voters Alliance (**MVA**) as a 501c4 in 2003. The Alliance's website is at www.MNVoters.org. A grass roots organization, it is not affiliated with any party.

Comments and discussion – Cilek's presentation focused primarily on changing elections in Minnesota to a partisan basis and in opposing Instant Runoff Voting elections.

1. Cilek's presentation cited the **nonpartisan election of all offices including judges** as a widely recognized fault in Minnesota's voting processes. He believes that partisan basis elections offer voters a "realistic opportunity to cast an **"informed vote"** by revealing the political affiliations of the candidates, if any, and printing such designations on the ballot. And, Cilek believes, partisan elections provide a healthier diversity of viewpoints and stronger, more transplant elections, thus giving voters the power to ensure greater accountability. Minnesota Voters Alliance (**MVA**) literature, made available at our meeting, says "regardless of whether or not judicial candidates receive contributions from political parties, they are still by statutory definition considered "members of political parties" as they, too are voting citizens. Claiming to be "qualified" or "having the right temperament" does not tell voters much of anything as evidence by surveys conducted by the **MVA**.
2. The **MVA** also believes that most people confuse the word "**nonpartisan**" with "**impartial**." But without knowledge of a judge's political leanings how can a voter determine if a decision is influenced by partisanship. The partisan/nonpartisan debate is not about impartiality or conscientious governance, it's about keeping voters informed, says Cilek.
3. Cilek's other major point of emphasis dealt with **Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)**. In response to proponents of **IRV** who allege that the present primary system "undermines the 50%+1 majority-winner" practice, Cilek responds, "Where is it written we must have a 50%+1 majority-winner requirement? The Founding Fathers built a constitutional republic, not a majority-rule because a pure majority rule often leads to tyranny." **IRV** doesn't solve this perceived problem, it only creates an artificially fabricated majority by counting second and third choices. In addition, his materials say that the more candidates there are in an **IRV** race, the more difficult it will be for voters to gain knowledge of the various candidates. According to the **MVA**, primaries provide an organized environment for debate and have proven to be an essential part of the electoral process. The purpose primaries is to allow voters to "select" candidates to represent their views in the general election, to force candidates to prove themselves worthy to serve, and to reduce the field of candidates to a more practical number.

4. In responding to the position of **IRV** supporters that such a process would eliminate low-turnout primaries and bring the most voters together with the most candidates to choose from at the same election, **MVA** literature replies, “Where does it say that low primary turnout is a bad thing? Those who show up decide who the candidates are. If people don’t show up, it must mean it’s not that important to them and that’s their right too.” **IRV** is more likely to deter serious candidates who would otherwise run but lack the necessary name recognition to overcome activist factions, according to Cilek.
5. The **MVA** position believes that in an increasingly diverse political environment, a plurality system (where the candidate who receives the most votes wins, even if it is less than 50%) is far superior to one that creates only an artificial majority. If **IRV** became the norm, “we could easily end up with a one party system made up of a tyrannical ruling elite,” says an MVA position paper. It goes on to say that **IRV** serves only to suppress viewpoints, limit accountability by diminishing party influence, create more opportunities for irregularities and manipulation and further disenfranchise voters by removing them one more step from the electoral process.
6. Two other **MVA** positions as stated in documentation Cilek made available dealt with redistricting and campaign finance. A constitutionally mandated method of setting district boundaries should be adopted to avoid gerrymandering and campaign financial challenges require full disclosure and/or government funding.

Questions and Answers –

1. **Question:** What is your organization (the **MVA**) all about? **Answer:** Every party is entitled to advance a candidate to the general election in addition to each qualified independent candidate. We are for partisan elections.

2. **Question:** How would you deal with nonpartisan situations such as election of school boards or municipal officials in which parties don’t participate and whose areas of interest generally have no political flavor? **Answer:** Our (**MVA**) surveys show that voters are most interested in knowing the party of a candidate. People deserve all the help and they can get and people should not be deprived of valuable information such as the party affiliation of candidates.

3. **Question:** For some reason, the democratic system in Minnesota is not working well. There appears to be much too much impact by special interest groups and too much disagreement between the parties. How would you address this? **Answer:** Regarding the parties, I disagree. Disagreement is a good thing. As Thomas Jefferson stated, there must, by the nature of man, be violent dissensions and discord. Regarding special interest groups, there will always be those two.

4. **Question:** Do you feel that individuals elected to the state legislature are too heavily slanted towards special interest groups? **Answer:** Our response is to have term limits. They already are in place in 23 states.

5. **Question:** Do you believe party designation should be on the ballot for every office? **Answer:** Yes, if there is an election, the party designations of the candidates should be printed on the ballot.

6. **Question:** What is your reaction to the Quie Commission report on the election of judges? **Answer:** We absolutely reject what the Quie commission is doing. Article 6 of the Minnesota Constitution guarantees us the right to elect judges. We believe voters should keep that right. We agree that the current system is broken believe that Canon 5 is completely worthless, but we should fix the main problem (nonpartisan elections) by going to partisan ‘basis’ elections, not taking away the citizens right to vote.