

Legislation would give more ballot access to 3rd parties

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Legislation designed to make it easier for third parties to get their candidates on the ballot is expected to win approval from state lawmakers.

That's right, Republicans and Democrats appear ready to vote for a law making it easier for third parties to get on the ballot despite the common belief those parties draw voters away from the major parties.

"It does sound counter-intuitive, doesn't it," said Rep. Bruce Patterson (R-Canton), chair of the state House Redistricting and Elections Committee. "But there is also a belief that if the system is seen as more legitimate, voters will view it less cynically and it will increase voter participation overall."

Standard is the issue

"At issue is the standard third parties must meet to maintain ballot access. Current Michigan law says the party's 'principle candidate,' the one highest up the ballot, must get 1 percent of the number of votes cast for winner in the Secretary of State's race.

That produced an odd result in the 2000 elections. A dispute in

the Reform Party kept that party's candidates for president off the ballot in Michigan. Libertarians had a presidential candidate, Harry Browne, but he didn't fare very well. According to Libertarian spokesman Fred Collins, voters returned to the major parties because the Bush-Gore race was so close.

So Libertarians didn't meet the standard. The Reform Party, whose highest candidate was running for U.S. Senate, however, did. Yet the Libertarian candidate for Senate got 20,000 votes.

Collins said that to get back on the ballot, his party had to circulate petitions at an expense of \$30,000 and innumerable volunteer hours. Rep. Leon Drolet (R-Clinton Township) has sponsored House Bill 6287 to change the standard. His bill would define a party's principle candidate as the one that gets the highest number of votes, regardless of which office he or she is running for.

Drolet contends the current standard "distorts the process" and "penalizes parties with the broadest number of candidates."

"I've been told that these third parties would like to run people higher up the ballot," Drolet explained, "but have decided not

to run a candidate at the top of the ticket, but go for some lower office or some obscure seat in order to maintain ballot access."

Success predicted

Patterson predicts the bill will win approval when it comes up again before his committee on Thursday, Feb. 21.

The change has won the support of the Libertarians, the Constitution Party and the Green Party of Michigan.

The Reform Party too supports the change, even though it kept its place on the ballot in the last election. Party officials have told lawmakers they agree the outcome of the last election was unfair.

The change would solve "one of the more onerous quandaries" for third parties in current election law, according to Green Party spokesman Marc Reichardt.

Drolet said the assumption has always been that if ballot access laws were made easier that third parties will lead up numerous candidates at the top of the ticket. That hasn't happened in the 34 states that have similar standards for ballot access, he said. The highest number of candidates at the top of the ticket in those states has been seven, he said.

INK WELL

CEDARVILLE SCHOLAR

Farmington Hills native Benjamin Blackner recently received a Faculty Scholarship from Cedarville University in Ohio. The scholarship is awarded to first-year students who have high ACT/SAT scores and a cumulative high school grade

point average of 3.0 or higher. Blackner is a senior at Farmington High School and the son of Robert and Cindy Blackner of Farmington Hills.

POWER FUNDRAISERS

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Middle School, recently initiated a fundraising week for the Food Bank of Oakland County. Some of the week's festivities included shaving off Mr. Ross' beard, renting ties for a day, and the school's annual Turkey Trot. A total of \$2,500 was raised for the food bank.

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