

Do symbols mean anything anymore?

How much meaning do you give symbols? Political conventions are full of them, rituals in their own right. In Cleveland this week, we saw elephants, pictures of Reagan and Lincoln and heard addresses from members of the Grand Old Party. The balloons, streamers and speeches worked to bring the party faithful together in celebration of the ideas that make up Republicanism. Next week we will see the same thing occur with the Democrats.

As part of the process, a party platform is drafted. It is a symbolic document either meant to serve as an “elevator pitch” about the party’s principles or as a detailed statement of its governing priorities. But you can’t directly force elected officials to follow it. In Maine, there are Republican officials who support taxpayer-subsidized political campaigns, despite it being opposed in the GOP platform. And there are pro-life Democrats, despite their party’s platform supporting abortion rights.

Nevertheless, we develop symbols because they convey meaning. There are no laws binding a politician to the tenets of his party platform, but it is difficult for an official to venture too far afield and still find support from his party. Whether you love the party system or hate it, the fact remains you need a majority of votes to pass legislation; parties are a way to get the needed votes, and platforms help build the party.

That is why the efforts of Rep. Stacey Guerin of Glenburn, a small-business woman and Republican delegate, as a member of the GOP platform committee are so interesting. She successfully passed an amendment to the platform, adding language stating Republicans believe states should consent to national monuments. You can see the application in Maine.

Speaking with opponents of Roxanne Quimby’s national monument, they believe it is a fait accompli — that at some point in the final days of the Obama administration the president will, without Congress, declare a Maine North Woods monument. Should Donald Trump be elected, we will then see how much he believes in the GOP platform. After all, whether the advocates’ polls showing support for a national monument are correct or not, the law in Maine now clearly states that the state does not consent to the action. Will Trump undo Barack Obama’s decision, either unilaterally or through Congress? Or will Guerin’s contribution to the Republican platform remain merely a symbol?

Meanwhile, we again spent a week with the American flag at half-staff for the Baton Rouge police officers lost. A symbol of honor and mourning. Their loss coupled with the Dallas shootings and countless other cowardly attacks against police led President Obama to pen an “open letter” to law enforcement nationwide, concluding with “ we have your backs.” He’s come a long way from talking about how “ stupidly” police in Cambridge, Massachusetts, acted in 2009 in arresting Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Yet we have spent more than half the month to date with the American flag at half-staff. It was first lowered for the victims of the Dallas attacks. Then, three days after returning the national ensign to full-hoist, it was lowered for the attack in Nice, France. The half-staff status was extended with the Baton Rouge shootings. This is in addition to the days it already was flying at half-staff this year, in honor of the victims of the Orlando shooting in June, the Brussels terror attack victims in April, Nancy Reagan in March, and Justice Antonin Scalia in February.

It seems lowering the flag has become a reflex whenever something bad happens to in-favor people. It was once a poignant mark of national mourning for departed leaders — presidents, justices, See Cianchette, Page D3



OP ART BY GEORGE DANBY

Ranked-choice voting

What to consider in this fall ballot question

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS  
BDN STAFF

When voters go to the polls this November, they’ll decide whether to overhaul how Mainers elect representatives to Washington and Augusta, swapping the state’s current either/or system for one in which voters rank candidates in order of preference.

Under ranked-choice voting, also known as instant-runoff voting, voters rank the field of names on a ballot, selecting a first choice, second choice, third choice and so on, creating an instant runoff when no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the first-choice votes.

“With ranked-choice voting, you don’t have to choose between the lesser of two evils,” Kyle Bailey, campaign manager for the Committee for Ranked-Choice Voting, said. “You have the freedom to elect the candidate you think is the best for the job without the fear of electing the person you liked the least.”

However, researchers have found that, put into practice, ranked-choice voting could have the unintended consequences of reducing voter turnout and leading to higher numbers of disqualified ballots when voters make mistakes, potentially worsening inequalities within the electoral process.

“When we make voting changes, they often have unintended consequences,” Jason McDaniel, a political scientist at San Francisco State University, said. “They often seem to affect in a negative way marginal populations, and they are more likely not to engage in political participation.”

**Election reformers argue candidates will campaign more civilly under ranked-choice voting, but the flipside is that a more complex ballot could reduce voter turnout.**

Today, Maine voters select only one candidate for each position, no matter how many names appear on the ballot, and whoever takes the most votes is the winner, even if the candidate doesn’t earn a majority.

That would change with ranked-choice voting. A candidate would no longer just be fighting for votes but also second- and third-place posi-

tions. According to Bailey, that means a candidate would have an incentive to campaign less negatively in order to appeal to a broader cross-section of voters, not just a specific base of voters.

The idea behind this calculus is that it will empower moderate candidates who might not be the first choice of a majority of voters — because ideologically similar candidates might attract support from the same pool of voters, the so-called “Nader effect” — but may be an acceptable second choice for a majority.

Voters who are likely to support third-party and independent candidates may be more motivated to turn out to vote because they will feel empowered to express their preference without feeling as though they “wasted” their vote, Bailey said.

But McDaniel of San Francisco State University found that giving voters the option to rank multiple candidates in order of preference can lead some voters stay home on election day. His research, published last October in the Journal of Urban Affairs, shows that voter turnout in San Francisco — which began using ranked-choice voting to elect mayors in 2004 — declined because of the lack of a simple yes-or-no choice.

Between 1995 and 2011, turnout in mayoral elections declined markedly among voters with a high school education or less and among younger voters. In his research, McDaniel found that navigating the more complex ranked-choice ballot was the reason.

“The increased costs associated with voting in an IRV/RCV election fall most heavily on the youngest and least educated,” McDaniel wrote. “At the other end of the spectrum, sophisticated voters — those who have the highest levels of education and are most interested in and involved with the political process — appear to be better able to navigate the higher information costs and are less likely to be negatively affected.”

Under the fall ballot initiative in Maine, elections for Congress, the Blaine House and the Legislature would be subject to ranked-choice voting. McDaniel cautioned that turnout typically is lower in local elections than in state and

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Marijuana is not a green industry

Pot needs to address energy and climate

BY GINA WARREN  
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As voters go to the polls this November, at least four states will consider ballot questions on marijuana legalization. Pending proposals in Nevada, Maine and California would authorize recreational marijuana use, while Floridians will vote on whether to allow medical marijuana use.

Legalization of marijuana in the United States has spread rapidly over the last few years. Half of the states have already legalized marijuana in some form. Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington and the District of Columbia have legalized it for recreational use. And the Democratic Party platform committee recently voted 81 to 80 to amend the federal Controlled Substances Act to remove marijuana from the list of Schedule 1 drugs. The stated pur-

Marijuana production is rapidly developing into an extremely lucrative industry that can afford to manage its impacts on the environment

pose of this proposed amendment is to “provid[e] a reasoned pathway for future legalization.”

States with some form of legalized marijuana have implemented stringent regulatory and licensing schemes with regard to the who, what, where and how of marijuana possession, cultivation, and distribution. But policymakers have failed to address an important area: the marijuana industry’s energy and climate impacts. Although marijuana is a plant, it is not a “green” product when grown indoors. As more states — and, potentially, Congress — consider legalizing the marijuana industry, they should also adopt rules to make it more environmentally sustainable.

Indoor marijuana farms

Indoor marijuana cultivation is one of the most energy-intensive industries in the United States, generating nearly \$6 billion in energy costs annually. According to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, which carries out energy planning for the Columbia River Basin states (Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon), growing marijuana indoors consumes up to 5,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per kilogram of output. For comparison, aluminum production requires about 16 kilowatt-hours per kilogram.

Colorado’s experience demonstrates marijuana’s large energy footprint. Since the state legalized recreational marijuana in 2014, the industry has expanded rapidly there. In 2015 legal marijuana businesses in Colorado made nearly \$1 billion in sales, up 42 percent from the previous year. And as marijuana businesses become more competitive and specialized, growers are moving their farms indoors to get a more controlled product.

Indoor cultivation requires electricity to power high-intensity lights, frequent air exchanges and ventilation, and to maintain consistent temperatures and humidity levels day and night. As a result, the state now has numerous indoor warehouses that consume huge quantities of electricity.

Experts estimate that a 5,000-square-foot indoor marijuana facility in Colorado consumes six times more electricity per square foot than an average commercial business, and 49 times more than an average residence. Last year Denver officials sought guidance from the Department of Energy on ways to curb the industry’s power requirements. Electricity use in Denver is rising by 1.2 percent yearly, and marijuana farms account for nearly half of the increase.

Colorado has set a goal of generating 30 percent of its electricity See Pot, Page D3