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OPINION

Democracy: downfall of the masses?

By EMILY BURKETT
Staff writer

There's no such thing as too much of a good thing. Well, maybe that's true in terms of the garden-variety, warm-and-fuzzy ideas like love, happiness, pink unicorns on fluffy clouds, but in terms of democracy, the medicine might just be the poison that kills us.

With, quite possibly, one of the most apathetic populaces in history, it's little wonder that the mavericks of America have turned to "grassroots" democracy as a cure for our lack of interest. Everything from initiatives to teledemocracy has been proposed, and while this seems all good and well in theory, the actual practice is the political equivalent of allowing a toddler to play with a gun.

In our beautiful Golden State, we've gone a tad further than handing the toddler the gun. We decided to give him an AK-47 and then teach him how to use it. Our AK-47 goes by the innocuous title of the initiative and referendum process. Big name-astoundingly stupid results. For those unfamiliar, the initiative and referendum process allows for the constituency to have a direct say

in their government. It's a brilliant idea until you take it out of the idea stage, which is exactly what happened circa 1911. Since that hallowed day, we have managed to add a whopping 425 amendments. To give a little perspective, our national constitution has 27 amendments. This surplus in amendments is due to the initiative and referendum process. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor spent much time expounding on the benefits of a brief constitution. It's the reason our government is so successful, she says, the Constitution is comprehensible to the common man. By allowing citizens to include such temporal issues like horse-and-buggy laws within the body of the constitution, we've managed to turn a concise, well-written outline of our government into a veritable monstrosity.

It's called mob-rule and it's deadly. Just ask Socrates and his hemlock beverage. Mob-rule has forced some of the greatest minds to suicide as was the case in Ancient Greece. Athenian democracy was about as direct as it could get for the populace permitted to vote. With each citizen allowed to come before the legislature and voting left to the masses, the government was a mess of bylaws placed before a

populace with little knowledge or care for how it affected non-citizens. The same is true for the town hall meetings seen in early New England. For those of who point to Athens and early colonial self-rule as the paragon of direct democracy, please take a good, long look at the citizenry. The constituency was limited to property holders. Translation: white men with the money to get educated. If we were to propose an idea like this in today's society half the population would be up in arms.

But this isn't just a piece of history. Come November we'll be going round the merry-go-round again with more constitutional issues that leave the concerned feeling uncomfortable about their handing over to the populace at large. As a state, we have an alarming tendency to pass unconstitutional propositions. Take Proposition H of San Francisco, for instance, which forbids the ownership, manufacturing, or sale of handguns, just a slight violation of the Second Amendment. When working the initiative petitions for an upcoming election, it's easy to gain a sense of foreboding in regards to the mass stupidity of the nation. Emotional ploys tend to kick logic to the backseat. In truth, it all harkens back to some words of wisdom from

Men in Black. "A person is smart, people are dumb."

Unluckily, the Progressive Era didn't feel this way when they established the initiative process and, even more regrettably, the bulk of the modern direct democracy proponents don't either. Welcome to the wide world of teledemocracy where citizens change the course of government in the comfortable glow of their PC. The goal is to make it easier for citizens to participate but the idea comes with a slew of problems. Hackers, fraud, manipulation: lay those all aside. The biggest question: do we actually want these people to participate? If John Doe doesn't care enough to walk down to the polls, should he be making the laws that govern the nation? If John Doe doesn't care, why should we make it easier for him to participate? Teledemocracy would let him.

Chances are that Mr. Doe hasn't a clue what he's voting on and even if he were to attempt to educate himself, he'd likely fail. Politicians and litigators have mastered the art of fooling the masses to the point when voting yes actually means no. Studies have found that voters tend to go in with their minds firmly set on one answer, either yes or no, and vote that way on every

proposition. While this tunnel-vision voting is bad enough, it leads to contradictory ballots with the same citizen swinging both ways on the same issue.

There have been proposals of distributing an exam to voters to weed out the uninformed but this idea is rank of the literacy tests used to decrease African-American participation following the Civil War.

What it all comes down to is that we as a population are not informed enough to make these decisions. The truth is, we should leave it to the elected officials to decide. We elect them, moreover we pay them, so they can spend their lives educating themselves on the issues and we can go about the business of our daily lives. It's far easier for the populace to select a single candidate then to examine each issue set before the legislatures. The populace goes out of its way to pay these people to make these decisions so we should sit back and let them do their jobs.

Call it grassroots. Call it participatory. They're all fancy names describing what amounts to a plague on our society. The unadulterated truth is the same: the uninformed making the decisions that change the course of our world.

CAMPUS COMMENT >>>

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JEREMIAH CARDWELL
Culinary Arts



SONIA RERBELO
Undecided



MATTHEW SO
English



MICHAEL ABURAS
Music



RICHIE PASCUA
Nursing

"The Let's Braid Jeremiah Cardwell's Hair Club."

"An all-sports club."

"The Fire Club."

"The Midget Wrestling Club."

"Strip Club."