

There has been a lot of discussion regarding ensuring the legitimacy of the San Diego County Democratic Party's endorsement process, particularly with regards to chartering clubs and their associate members, especially among Young Democrats chapters. I discussed much of this at the last Council of Clubs meeting, but want to address it in further detail here.

First of all, I want to acknowledge that internships are main method by which Young Democrats, particularly students, and especially high school students, get involved with local Democratic Party politics. This has always been the case, one major reason being that it's one of the few ways that schools will allow outsiders to enter their campus and recruit students. I, myself, started out volunteering and later interning for Congressman Scott Peters' campaigns. Many fellow interns and staff on this campaign and others also began or greatly expanded their involvement in local Democratic Party politics this way, and now serve in leadership roles within the Party. I've helped former interns start and run Democratic clubs at their schools, and it's no easy task in the slightest, so I want to give major props to Andrea Cardenas and the rest of the South Bay Young Democrats for their superb organizing skills.

Second, I want to acknowledge that students are usually the predominant, volunteer source for canvassers and phonebankers, and they put in a *lot* of hours. This isn't to say that other folks do not volunteer many, many hours for candidates. But from my experience, few others will come after school or work, and canvass or phonebank for 5+ hours every weekday, and more on weekends and during summer break (but of course, props to those who do). The problem is, many folks continue to rely on Young Democrats' unpaid labor, yet tell us we aren't ready for leadership roles and only want our voices heard when we're echoing their own.

Now, if we're honest with ourselves, this isn't a new issue, and it's certainly not one specific to Young Democrats or a particular region. Elected officials and campaigns have been engaging in less than honorable methods for earning the county and state parties' endorsements for a long time, from club stacking and buying memberships, to creating and controlling clubs. I'm going to address broader concerns about loopholes in the county party's bylaws and possible solutions, while not focusing on specific clubs and allegations against them, because this is a wider issue and I think it's unfair to target specific students and their clubs. However, I will address concerns about how I feel proposed solutions will disproportionately impact Young Democrats clubs, especially those representing underprivileged communities, as many solutions have been targeted at Young Democrats clubs specifically, and many in the San Diego Democratic community don't realize the potential impacts as they were not themselves involved in the Young Democrats organization, or haven't been in some time.

Revising the Area Caucus Endorsement Recommendation Process

Let me again state that the goal here is to ensure the legitimacy of area recommendations and that they are indeed reflective of the communities they represent. We must, to the best of our ability, ensure that candidates and activists feel the endorsement process is legitimate, lest they feel wronged by the Party and become frustrated and disengaged, but if our Central Committee endorses the losing candidate, that's entirely on us. **My proposed solution that I have already forwarded along to the Director of the Council of Clubs, John Loughlin, is that we revise the area recommendation process to be more in line with the process by which the California Democratic Party does regional pre-endorsement conferences. Under the current bylaws, if a club has at least 20 chartered members in each area, they earn a club associate member in that area, and thus a vote in its area caucus. Under the CDP rules for regional pre-endorsement conferences, clubs earn one vote per 20 unique members**

in each Assembly District. My proposal would be to adapt this for SDCDP area caucus endorsement recommendations—one vote per 20 members (or another number) in each area. Proportional representation based on size of membership would take away any incentive to split larger clubs into multiple smaller ones. I know some Central Committee members may think this still dilutes their vote in the area caucus, but if the point is to ensure area endorsement recommendations are reflective of grassroots support, I think having more club votes in an area caucus is beneficial.

Most other proposed solutions that I've heard from recent letters and at the last Council of Clubs meetings focus on evidence that clubs are not legitimate and adding criteria for club chartering to ensure that they are. While I agree in principle, I think some of these would be difficult to implement at best, while others would be overly restrictive or even detrimental, and that the proposals may come from a lack of understanding due to privilege and/or ignorance of how Young Democrats, particularly student chapters, generally operate.

Joint Club Meetings

The first concern I have seen expressed is that some clubs meet at the same date and location. While it seems obvious that separate clubs should meet separately, I do have concerns. Firstly, I agree in principle that clubs should mostly meet separately to maintain their independence, but we have to consider the difficulty this can present for many, particularly student clubs. Most student clubs understandably choose to meet on their college or high school campus, but this is not always a viable option. Criteria and restrictive policies for recognition of clubs by school administrations varies widely from school-to-school including, including but not limited to:

- Having a teacher/professor serve as an advisor, when realistically many are unwilling to do so due to lack of time, already serving as an advisor to another club, not wanting to give away their party preference or seem biased to the students they teach, or because they are non-Democrats. For example, a student Democratic club at El Camino High School last year was unable meet due to a teachers' strike, meaning teachers did not offer their rooms during lunch for club meetings. While of course the students supported their teachers, they were left without a meeting space through the course of the strike. As another example, the Democratic Club at MiraCosta College had difficulties finding and retaining an advisor. Some of this may have stemmed from pressure by the school administration who didn't want the club to host candidates at their meetings, especially a candidate debate.
- Restrictive club registration windows of once or twice per year. I've heard from multiple high school students that they have a short window at the beginning of fall and spring semesters respectively, and if the window has closed, they have to wait several months, and by then interest in forming a club may have dwindled, especially if leading students have graduated.
- Not allowing political clubs at all. I'm sure this is probably illegal, at least at public schools, but students may not have the time, money, connections, or even capacity to attempt to sue them. They may feel they will be retaliated against by their administration or teachers, and would rather just not, especially if they are graduating soon. For example, I was told by students who graduated in 2018 that the Democratic and Republican clubs at El Camino High School that were both active in the 2017-18 academic year were basically disbanded by the school administration for no discernable reason, and replaced by a nonpartisan "Political Club". As another example, students with the Mission Vista High School Democratic Club were told by their school administration that they were not allowed to organize a voter registration drive on

campus, even on their own time (like during lunch), because students were not allowed to collect or possess the personal information of other students. Club leaders were concerned about angering the administration and how it may impact them at school. Now let's talk about off-campus potential meeting locations. One option that's generally free is having meetings at someone's home. However, it's understandable that many people's roommates/families either may not want to use their home as a public meeting space, whether for practical reasons, or privacy or safety concerns, or they may lack the space to do so. I personally don't have the space in my apartment to host a meeting, and my apartment complex's community space is nowhere near sufficient, either. Most clubs meet at restaurants or other public spaces. Unfortunately, many non-profit public spaces like community centers still require rather large payments for rent. Religious institutions such as churches may not be found to be suitable as meeting locations due to leanings of the institution/its leaders, or to ensure members of differing beliefs don't feel left out. Businesses usually charge room rental fees or a cover if folks don't purchase enough food. Particularly for student groups and those from underprivileged backgrounds, members may not be able to afford club dues to fund room rentals or afford to eat out at restaurants.

I have also passed on a couple proposed solutions to this concern to the Director of the Council of Clubs. First, have the SDCDP offer its headquarters as a free meeting space for clubs. This certainly doesn't solve everything, as there are still issues with the size of the meeting space, geographic location, and transportation for members who may lack it. Another solution is to have the SDCDP subsidize meeting rental space for student clubs, Young Democrat clubs, and/or all clubs. This would certainly be costly, but allow more independence from clubs who don't have to seek the financial support of elected officials, candidates, consultants, and big donors directly.

Minimum Club Meetings and Durations

Related to the above, I have also seen proposals that clubs meet at least six times per year, and that meetings be of a specific minimum duration to perform their club duties, including of a proposed one hour and a half or more as a minimum length for a meeting. My concern is that this is particularly difficult for student groups, especially those meeting on campus who may have limited access to meeting space. For example, most high school clubs meet during lunch, and I can't imagine they're allotted an hour and a half or longer for lunch—I certainly wasn't, and I was in high school not too long ago. As another example, the UCSD College Democrats meetings are from 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM weekly, nearly every Tuesday while school is in session, and has been for years, including during my time at UCSD less than 3 years ago. At UCSD, as I'm sure is true of other colleges, there is competition for meeting space among all of the school clubs, meaning there aren't many hours to go around. Further, there are restrictions for applying for meeting space, such as a required buffer between different clubs' meetings for the school staff to clean and reset the room, not even including time needed for club members to set up the meeting, which takes time out of their club's reserved time for the meeting space. When I was a member of UCSD College Democrats, we almost always got kicked out of the room because we overstayed when they needed to set up for another meeting or event.

I believe there is already a requirement for clubs to meet quarterly, so I'm not sure that increasing the minimum to 6 times per year would have any significant impact. I also have questions. Would social time count toward the minimum amount of time, or only the start and end times of the business portion of the meeting as indicated in the minutes? Would meetings

or events that are purely social or community service-oriented count? These questions may seem a bit into the weeds, but the answers would make a huge difference.

Tying Club Associate Votes to Club Endorsements

Another concern I've seen is that many clubs do not take formal endorsement votes, leaving their club associates free to vote for whomever they choose. The proposed solution that I've seen is for area caucus endorsement recommendation votes to only be cast with proof that a legitimate endorsement process has been completed for that race by each club in a non-joint meeting, and that this must involve notification of all candidates for the race under consideration, except in the case of a friendly incumbent endorsement. It is my understanding that clubs are already required to notify all candidates for the race under consideration before a club endorsement vote, except in the case of a friendly incumbent endorsement. If this isn't the case, then I certainly agree it should be, and I'm definitely open to increasing the number of days out that clubs must notify candidates ahead of an endorsement vote. If these bylaw provisions are not currently being followed, then we need to add teeth to the bylaws in order to ensure that they are being followed.

Regarding tying club associate votes to club endorsement votes, I again like the idea in theory, as someone who's been on the campaign side and worrying about club delegates being able to not vote for our candidate when said candidate had been endorsed by their club, but I think there should be room for flexibility. For instance, would an online vote or conference call vote of members qualify as a legitimate endorsement vote if it did not take place during a physical meeting? This is something Young Dems have done in the past when we didn't have a timely opportunity to have a full, in-person meeting, but still wanted our members to be able to weigh in and have their voices heard. I think it should be left up for Democratic Clubs to determine this. Club members may also prefer the trustee model of representation, rather than the delegate model—if members don't have the experience or time to make themselves knowledgeable about every candidate, piece of legislation, or resolution that they could feasibly vote on, they may prefer to have their club president or another member with more time or knowledge vote on their behalf.

Club Functions and Activities Outside of Meetings

Another concern I have read is that some clubs “do not function as corporate bodies outside of their common meeting”, with a proposed solution being that “clubs must demonstrate organized participation in their community, including, potentially, attendance at marches, protests, canvasses, special events, or the meetings of planning groups, boards and commissions, city councils, boards of supervisors, and the state and federal legislatures,” with the admin committee being responsible for identifying measurable criteria that could demonstrate this participation. Again, I agree in principle but think it would be very difficult to determine and evaluate this criteria objectively. If this were to happen, it would have to include on-campus activities for student clubs, such as student voter registration drives, on-campus protests, and townhalls, etc. Even if this were implemented, I think it would be very difficult for an outsider to verify the activities actually took place and could be easily circumvented.

I've seen concerns about some clubs not having their own, individual websites or social media platforms. The obvious solution would be to require that they do so, but the implementation of this would be complicated. Would this mean that a page on a collective website wouldn't count? Would there be criteria for what needs to be listed on the social media platforms and websites,

and how often they need to be updated? Would it only need to be one social media platform, or multiple? Would there be a list of acceptable and/or required platforms? This could cause other issues as older generations are more likely to use Facebook, while younger folks are more likely to use Instagram, etc. I'm certain that a lot of (if not most) clubs in the county would fail this provision, most of them not being Young Democrats chapters.

My preferred solution would be that which was proposed by the Director of the Council of Clubs, which would be to have the San Diego County Democratic Party and/or Council of Clubs include the important information for each club on its own website, probably most easily a copy of all chartering information and bylaws for each club.

Mixed Membership

I've seen concerns that some predominantly student clubs have non-student members and charter as regional clubs, don't meet on-campus, and don't have an academic advisor. I've stated above reasons why I don't believe the latter two are or should be necessary, and am unconcerned about the first, as, if anything they followed the bylaws by not attempting to charter with non-students as an academic club, which would've allowed them to not pay chartering fees to the County Party. **However, I do like the proposal that all clubs must maintain at least 20 unique members to obtain and preserve their charter, something I've advocated for previously. While this would certainly make it harder to charter with the county party, I think the idea of not allowing overlap in chartering members for clubs is the best solution. As mentioned above, the CDP requires 20 unique chartered members in an Assembly District for participation in the pre-endorsement conferences, so this is something clubs should already be aware of. As a point of information, the California Young Democrats requires 10 unique members at minimum to charter with the state organization, which I think is similarly effective.**

Transparency and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

I've seen concerns about consultants' participation in the SDCDP endorsement process, and for this I think the simplest solution would be to **require that a consultant that the party contracts with not also contract with candidates in races subject to endorsement by the County Party's Central Committee, in order to avoid any potential conflict of interest. This seems restrictive, but only county and lower races are considered at the county level, so this would not prohibit the County Party's consultant(s) from working on state assembly, state senate, congressional, or statewide races, or any local races outside of San Diego County.**

Requiring Young Democrats to Have An Advisor

This one in particular I addressed at the last Council of Clubs meeting, but I want to further reiterate. There was a proposal that all Young Democrats clubs have an advisor from the Council of Clubs' Club Development Committee. I maintain that this is a bit infantilizing, for both young professionals and student groups. Our new County Party Chair and three Vice Chairs are Young Democrats. I graduated from UCSD in 2016 where I served on the board of the UCSD College Democrats, and in 2017 I joined the Council of Clubs' Club Development Committee. Just recently a student, and still a Young Democrat, would I have been allowed to advise myself and other Young Democrats clubs? If we trust Young Democrats for leadership roles, we should trust them to run their own clubs. That is not to say clubs don't need any advice, but like other

non-Young Democrat clubs, we have former Presidents and board members, as well as, for many, school advisors, and other Young Democrat leaders, such as those I've mentioned above.

Conclusion

Again, I want to further reiterate my support for ensuring transparency and the legitimacy of the San Diego County Democratic Party's endorsement process, as well as my continued willingness to collaborate on proposed solutions. However, I will protect and support the Young Democrats who have had to and continue to overcome so many more barriers and restrictive policies already in order to organize their communities (and have still done a better job at it than many). Young Democrats aren't just here to provide free labor—we're here to have our voices heard, and we're here to stay.

Regards,

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*The above titles are for identification purposes only and should not be construed as to indicate endorsement of the above by any affiliated organizations.