

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Undermining democracy

Local news coverage is vitally important to a functioning democracy.

A front page story in Saturday's Mercury illustrates why.

According to reporting by Karen Shuey, the Berks County Republican Committee has decided it doesn't have to seat candidates who were legally elected in the May primary.

Here's an excerpt from Shuey's story:

Jamie Kyle was elected in the May primary to serve as a Republican committee person.

She ran a write-in campaign for the seat in Douglas Township's second precinct. And she won.

A few weeks after election day, Kyle received a letter from the Berks county elections office informing her that the election results had been certified and she was an official winner of her race.

"You would think that would be the end of the story," Kyle told the Berks County Election Board during a meeting last week. "Unfortunately, it's not."

Shortly after getting the notice from the county, Kyle received another letter in the mail. This one was from the chairwoman of the credentials committee of the Berks County Republican Committee.

The letter directed Kyle to fill out an attached questionnaire so the credentials committee could determine her eligibility to be seated by the executive committee.

Kyle was confused. She had won the election, which in her mind meant the seat was hers. But now, the Republican committee was telling her that winning an election might not be enough.

"I was elected so I didn't understand why I was getting this letter," she said. "It didn't make sense."

As Kyle perused the questionnaire, her confusion began to shift towards anger. Some of the questions seemed inappropriate, some seemed too personal.

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She balked at questions about her mental health history and about whether she agreed with a series of ideological statements.

Reporter Shuey talked with two other duly elected Republican committee members who had the same experience as Kyle and questioned why they needed to fill out an intrusive questionnaire.

Shuey then talked with Clay Breece, the chairman of the county Republican committee.

Breece said the committee's bylaws create the positions that appear on the ballot, and the committee has the power to determine its own membership regardless of the results of the election.

I was interested to see these bylaws. I went on the Berks Republican Committee's

website, and guess what? They weren't there.

I was also interested to see the questionnaire that duly elected committee persons were told to fill out. The questionnaire wasn't posted, either.

So much for transparency.

Shuey reached out to G. Terry Madonna, the non-partisan dean of Pennsylvania political polling and emeritus professor at Millersville University.

In 30 years of polling statewide, Madonna said, he had never heard of such a practice. He questioned the committee's legal authority to enact such requirements for an elected committee person.

"People get elected who have a wide variety of views, and what they are basically trying to do, it seems to me, is to ensure they have the right ideology.... What this means is that they will ruin the diversity of the party. They are trying to ensure they get a single ideological orientation."

This incident shows why we need local news. If rank and file Berks Republicans condone Breece and his cronies flouting democracy and hand-picking their own people regardless of who got elected, that's on them.

But at least everybody knows what's going on.

**CORRECTION:** After this article was published, a reader pointed out the bylaws are published on the BCRC website, but they are not readily apparent. I needed his guidance to find them.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton



Clay Breece