

Angus King, Class of 1966, served two terms as Governor of Maine, as an Independent.

I have read your note to our classes on the Association of Alumni election and strongly disagree with your characterization of the issues at stake in this election. To boil this controversy down to "are you for the lawsuit or against it" is, to put it charitably, grossly misleading.

No one is in favor of suing their college--unless an important principle is at stake and you are given no other alternative. And unfortunately, no other alternative is exactly this case. Last fall, the Board abrogated the right of the alumni to elect half the Trustees and effectively closed all avenues to question, let alone reverse, this decision. Hence, the lawsuit. To blame the suit on those who brought it, it seems to me, has it exactly backwards. By your logic, if someone defrauds you in business and refuses to make good on your loss, you are the bad guy for bringing suit to recover your property. This position doesn't pass the straight face test.

The simple issue is not the lawsuit, it's the incredibly high-handed and short-sighted action of the Board last fall which vitiated the 100 year old practice--based upon an agreement between the College and its alumni--of providing the alumni with equal representation on the Board. Parity is the issue and those who believe this principle to be important and worth maintaining had no other choice but to bring the suit--because the College and the majority of Trustees made it clear that they had no interest in seeing this principle honored. Indeed the very purpose--the whole idea--of the Board's action last fall was to nullify this principle. And as near as I can tell, until the suit was filed neither the Board majority nor the administration had the slightest interest in "working within the Dartmouth family to address their concerns".

Two additional points. First. I'm still astonished at the action of the Board from the point of view of process. After losing three or four elections in a row, including the ill-fated effort a couple of years ago to rig the alumni constitution, instead of responding to the issues being raised by the insurgent trustees and the large number of alumni who kept electing them, the majority of the Board simply abrogated the process itself. I thought we left "if I don't get my way, I'm taking my bat (or in this case, ballot box) and going home" on the sandlots of our youth.

I have some first hand experience with this democracy stuff and it is often cumbersome and sometimes downright annoying. But when you lose elections and keep losing, the idea is to figure out why and respond to the issues being raised, not simply change the rules so you don't have to cope with that pesky majority which disagrees with you. We all would deplore such an act in a developing country ("Ruling junta cancels elections; cites expense and chaos of recent balloting"); it is this action which has shamed Dartmouth, not the lawsuit whose purpose is to rectify it.

Regardless of one's position on any of the underlying issues, I don't see how anyone can defend what these folks did last fall. It's just plain wrong to cancel an established democratic process because you lose a couple of elections and both of us know it.

My second and concluding point is that for the life of me, I can't figure out why you or any other alumnus/alumna would for a minute support the College administration in abrogating our own power in the governance of the college. It just doesn't make sense. I can understand the administration's motives--no executive likes an activist board which questions its prerogatives and power. But for any alumnus to sit still for this--and in many cases actively abet it--I just don't understand. For if this is allowed to stand, the time will come--sooner rather than later in my opinion--when decisions will be made which you and I and the majority of alumni will strenuously oppose, but we'll be powerless to stop them.

For once you have laid your sword and buckler aside--once the suit is dismissed--they cannot be taken up again, and something important will have been lost.

So let's be honest--this vote is about parity, not the lawsuit. If the establishment slate (for want of a better term) is elected, the lawsuit goes away, and if the lawsuit goes away, parity goes away. It's that simple. And I'm still listening and waiting for a reason parity should be abandoned. So far, I haven't heard it.

Best,

Angus King '66