

The Crimson White

Serving the University of Alabama community since 1894

Vol. 94, No. 58

University, Alabama

Wednesday, January 30, 1985

Administrators call election rules confining

By JAN CRAWFORD
and STEPHEN LOMAX

Several factors including the SGA Code of Laws and dominance of political groups limit student participation in the SGA and limit its effectiveness, some University administrators and faculty members say.

Sections in the Code of Laws are designed to curtail student participation and restrain free campaigning, John Baier, vice president of student affairs, said Tuesday. He said these restraints were "inappropriate" in an academic community.

Baier said eliminating "simple little things" in the Code of Laws such as the three-day campaign restriction would increase student participation in SGA executive and senatorial campaigns. The SGA senate voted in a special session Tuesday to table a bill which would eliminate the section in the Code limiting duration of campaigns.

"BECAUSE we've restrained students' ability to campaign, we've encouraged endorsement of candidates by certain factions," Baier said. "If someone is endorsed by a specific organization which can muster 3,000 people to a polling place on the basis of loyalty to that organization, they can dominate the election process.

"Perhaps it's time, as we try to upgrade research and academics at the University, to also encourage quality student leaders by encouraging full participation of all

students," he said.

Baier said he would like to see a more open electoral process.

"The key is reforming political practices to eliminate campaign restrictions," he said. "Without support of a political faction, you've got to have more than three days to win on a campus of 15,000."

THE PARTY in power in any political system has a tendency to reform the rules to strengthen its ability to



CW file photo

Vice President for Student Affairs John Baier (left) calls limitations on student campaigning "inappropriate" in an academic community.

Student Life Director Melford Espey calls the SGA's Code of Laws "a little too restrictive."

remain in power, Baier said.

"In the 40 years of a Machine-dominated SGA, the rules have been modified to perpetuate the dominance of the Machine in SGA affairs.

"I don't think it's credit to the Machine that Machine-endorsed candidates are elected; it is a discredit to the election process on this campus that one group of students dominates," he said.

"But that decision is for the students to make, not for me to make. Students will be governed by whom and what they choose."

STUDENTS who aren't affiliated with the Machine are capable of leadership, as past SGA president John Bolus proved, Baier said.

"The University ought to be a marketplace for free exchange of ideas, and that part of the SGA is its great single weakness," he said. "One's affiliation doesn't dictate one's ability to serve.

"What we're dealing with here is the 'Good ol' boy' political infrastructure which, hopefully, the South has realized is not conducive for an effective campaign," he said. "We've made changes in the state and we need changes in the University."

Baier said SGA administrations "remind me a little of the old electoral process in the Democratic Party that used to be controlled by the likes of (former Chicago) Mayor (Richard) Daley. I think the country is better off without that type of political infrastructure and I think the campus would be."

VICTOR Gibean, University political science professor, said he felt SGA administrations are not representative of University students.

"I stand as an outsider and I just observe it (the SGA) in passing. I feel that most students don't feel represented by the SGA," he said. "Most students don't take it very seriously. They come here for four years and view it as outsiders.

"I don't think any real effort has been made to find out what students really want," he said. "Probably many of the things students want would be impossible to have."

Another problem with the SGA is presentation of the students' wants to the administration, said Patrick Cotter, University political science professor and director of the Capstone Poll.

"THERE are a lot of statements about what the students want to the faculty and administration, but there is not much basis for those statements," he said.

Melford Espey, director of Student Life, agreed with Baier and said the Code of Laws is "a little too restrictive."

"You can't mount a campaign in four days," he said. "It's impossible."

Espey worked with the SGA as a University student and has worked with the organization as an administrator for the past 15 years. He works primarily with the finances of the SGA.