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## Three alternative parties gain court order on gifts

BY ROBERT SCHWANEBERG  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Three alternative political parties — the Conservatives, Greens and Libertarians — have won a court order allowing them to raise and distribute campaign contributions on an equal footing with the Democratic and Republican parties.

Without official recognition as political parties in New Jersey, the alternative parties are treated like political action committees and subject to the same contribution limits. For any given election, the most they can accept from an individual is \$7,200; the most they can give to any one candidate is \$8,200.

The consent decree signed by state Superior Court Judge Neil Shuster allows the Conservatives, Greens and Libertarians to set up statewide political committees that can accept up to \$25,000 per year and make unlimited contributions to their candidates — just like the Democratic and Republican state committees.

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GEORGE DeCARLO, chairman,  
Green Party of New Jersey

Leaders of alternative parties said the court order, which settles a lawsuit they had filed, is a modest step toward official recognition.

“It’s just helping to level the playing field,” George DeCarlo, chairman of the Green Party of New Jersey, said. “Is it going to get us full political party status in New Jersey? Absolutely not.”

Neither Republican State Chairman Tom Wilson nor Assemblyman Joe Cryan (D-Union), the Democratic State chairman, had any objection to the consent decree, but both said they worry about new alternative parties being established for nefarious ends.

Cryan said he is concerned about new alternative parties that are really “single-interest groups” with a narrow focus, such as abor-

tion, that tip the balance in close elections.

Wilson said he could “see a time in the future” when a new alternative party might be established as “a shell” to funnel money to a major party in an end run around contribution limits.

“This is New Jersey, where finding a way to exploit the loopholes in the law has become a full-time occupation for a certain class of folks,” Wilson said.

Alternative parties have long complained New Jersey’s election laws are rigged against them. Only the Democrats and Republicans meet the stringent criteria for party recognition established in 1920.

“We’re the only state in the country that hasn’t recognized another political party since Prohibition,” said Renee Steinhagen of the New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center, who represented the alternative parties.

*Robert Schwaneberg may be reached at (609) 989-0324 or [rschwaneberg@starledger.com](mailto:rschwaneberg@starledger.com).*