

A Vote for State Vegetable: An Argumentative Analysis

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Not until March 2023 was a picture of a potato shooting hot pink laser beams from its eyes at an onion, popular! Wrapping one's mind around this image is nearly impossible. However, right now many vegetables are at war, battling to be crowned "Oregon's state vegetable." Since 2021, legislative bills have been debated on what vegetable embodies our great green state the best, but no such bill has ever been able to be passed. The most current measure proposed is the "Senate Concurrent Resolution 3," written by Melissa Leoni--a Legislative Policy and Research Office representative (2023, p. 1). This preliminary summary has passed the House and will soon be voted on in the Senate. The preliminary summary outlines the reasons why the potato should be the state vegetable.

Unfortunately, the reasoning within the measure itself does not constitute as *efficient enough evidence* to give the potato a real advantage over other vegetables. This is because the preliminary summary is based on the testimonials submitted on the issue, and the characteristics that the state is looking for have not been defined. As a result, testimonials are written differently depending on what a person defines as the characteristics of a state vegetable. Testimony has been submitted covering numerous issues, yet instead of the reasoning supporting the measure's claim it has made the measure itself vaguer because vocabulary is covering multiple different ideas. This has caused fallacies within the measure like the appeal to nature and the fallacy of equivocation.

The reason why the state is looking for a state vegetable not being clarified is the main cause for ambiguity in the argument. In most cases, when a state decides to take up the task of creating a state emblem there is a reason behind it. For example, according to World Atlas--an educational geography website in operation since 1996--, Oregon's state flower is the Oregon Grape, and it was voted as such because it "was chosen to represent the beauty and abundance found throughout" (2018, p. 1). In the case of the vote for Oregon's state vegetable, there has been no specified purpose as to why Oregon should declare a state vegetable. One could assume multiple interpretations of the character traits a state vegetable should exemplify

due to this undefined need. This has produced a broad spectrum of evidence that can support many points of view. One testimonial from Jensvold B. just gives general information about the vegetable. This information brings up the argument that a potato is not even considered a vegetable in Oregon, and that onions are the largest “field crop” (2023, p. 1). This argues the definition of a vegetable rather than how it impacts Oregon’s economy or community. Other testimonies claim a different defining trait that they think the state vegetable should display. According to AJ Earl, the Camas Root is more representative of Oregon's diversity and steadfastness, and therefore it carries the potential to be the state vegetable instead (2023, p. 1). Since the state of Oregon has not given a specific reason why it is declaring a state vegetable how could one be chosen? There is no guide for what the state wants the vegetable to represent and because of this, the preliminary measure has to include all areas and all general information can be applied to many different contexts and concepts. Clarifying what purpose Oregon’s state vegetable will serve and what it should represent would be a better strategy to provide this argument with more specific reasoning.

Not only is the purpose of Senate Current Resolution 3 creating cracks in clarity for the argument, but the argument for the potato itself is weaved within fallacies of equivocation and the appeal to nature. The arguments within the measure are clear to read, but a lack of purpose and context leads to fallacies. The first of these fallacies is the appeal to nature. Appeal to nature happens when words are given as a reason. These words include characteristics that could be applied to almost any other vegetable such as, “vital” [...] “nutritious” [...] “contributing to the state’s health and economic well-being” [...] “are exported to international markets” [...] and “farmers have donated” (Leoni, 2023). All these words are appeals to the nature of the object made from deductive reasoning. One such example is the use of the word “vital.” One testimony that was submitted was from Senator Bill Hansell from Oregon District 29: “One medium potato has more potassium than a banana” (2023, p.1). This evidence could have been used to form the idea that potatoes are “vital,” but since this was not explained it is a fallacy of

nature. For something to be vital, by definition, it must be necessary for life. Potassium is necessary for the function of the human body. This means, that by the first premise of the deduction that “vital” means it is necessary for life, then anything vital for life could be applied to the second premise. The second premise could be that potassium is vital for life because the body can’t function properly without it. These premises are true. The third premise is that potatoes have potassium. This is also true, and the conclusion that potatoes are vital is certainly valid, but the argument is not true. Just because potatoes have potassium doesn’t make them vital. Anything else in the world that has potassium could be considered vital if that were the case. This is the appeal to nature. Any other descriptive element in the measure qualifying the potato to be the state vegetable can be argued falsely with this logic as well. The appeal to nature can be made to almost every phrase in the measure, and there is a discrepancy between the meanings of some words as well.

Because of all the contexts within the testimonial submitted for this argument, on which the measure’s wording was most likely based, the meanings of words can be confused. When a word can be interpreted or applied in many different ways and it is not explained how exactly is being used, then this can be considered an ambiguity fallacy of equivocation. There are many different occasions this happens in the argument for the potato to be the state vegetable. Like in the previous example, not only is using the word “vital” to reason a claim a fallacy of nature, but it is also an equivocation fallacy. The way the word “vital” can be interpreted in the context of this argument is either by nutrition or the role it plays in the community. If the reasons behind the use of this word were clarified, then one might be able to argue that the potato is vital *to the community*. Take testimony from Oregon Potatoes for example: “Farmers annually donate one million pounds of potatoes to the Oregon Food Bank” (2023, p. 1). From this evidence, it could be further argued, if the main food source of a family comes from the Oregon Food Bank, and potatoes are the main thing that fills that donation center, that if the potatoes were not as abundantly donated some families would experience a lack of food. Food is vital, and since

potatoes were potentially the main food source of certain families or communities then it could be argued that potatoes are vital to the community. Unfortunately, the way the word is used with all the issues that the potato can impact is not specifically expressed. Therefore, many words cannot be considered true because they claim they support is not clear, so there can be no warrant. These fallacies of equivocation leave the reader confused because claims can mean many different things in different contexts.

The logic of this argument all comes down to clarity. The clarity in the purpose of creating the measure. The clarity in what characteristics the vegetable of Oregon should exhibit to represent Oregon, or areas of the state it should impact. The clarity in the relevance of evidence, and clarity in the use of words. When someone is fighting a war and they don't know why they are fighting it they will most likely give up and stop fighting because they see no purpose, or they will fight indefinitely never knowing when the war is won.

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