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FEDERAL JUDGE HALTS REPUBLICAN EFFORT TO CLOSE PRIMARIES: VICTORY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN AND INDEPENDENT VOTERS

IndependentVoting.org, a national association of independent voters and a defender of South Carolina's open primary system, hailed a federal court judge's ruling in the Spartanburg division that the Greenville Republican Party did not have standing to sue to close the South Carolina primaries and impose party registration. In June, the State Republican Party withdrew from the lawsuit leaving the Greenville GOP as the sole plaintiff in the case which has been pending since 2010. Today's ruling dismissed the lawsuit and ends what was considered a voter suppression effort by voting rights activists.

IndependentVoting.org led the formation of a broad coalition who joined as defendant/intervenors in defending open primaries which included: thirteen members of the South Carolina Black Legislative Caucus, the South Carolina Independence Party, the Progressive Network, the Constitution Party and the Columbia Tea Party.

Jacqueline Salit, president of IndependentVoting.org said, "On Sunday, tens of thousands of Americans will gather in Washington DC to commemorate the 50 year anniversary of Dr. Kings 1963 march on Washington. We're 50 years down the road from that critical moment in the struggle for social and political justice. Today's decision in Spartanburg, opens a new chapter in the struggle for full democracy and equality. A struggle which will be lead by African Americans in partnership with independent voters. The coalition that came together to protect open primaries and voting rights in South Carolina is a precious one. We intend to expand it all across the United States of America."

State Representative Joe Neal added, "today the South Carolina federal court has upheld the rights of voters in South Carolina, especially the minority community to free and unfettered access to the polls. This measure promoted by the Greenville Republican Party would have eliminated the ability of hundreds of thousands of African Americans to have a voice in who

represent them in many positions of influence in South Carolina. It is for that reason I applaud the actions of the court and ask every South Carolinian to do the same. Today was a great victory for voting rights in South Carolina.”

Harry Kresky who argued the standing issue on behalf of the intervenors added “Today’s ruling was a major setback for a small ultra conservative faction of the South Carolina Republican Party that hoped to strengthen its hand in intra-party battles at the expense of the rights of the voters and citizens of the State.”

“This case is a major victory over the Republican Party's efforts to exclude independents and African Americans. South Carolinians have always been fiercely independent. As an intervenor, I am proud that we stopped the Republican Party from closing our state's primary elections,” stated Wayne Griffin chair of the SC Independence Party.

In March of 2011, the court issued an initial ruling that South Carolina’s open primary system was constitutional, but the plaintiffs were granted the opportunity to conduct discovery and take the case to trial. Law professor Paul Finkleman, based in Albany, New York, submitted an expert report on behalf of the intervenors showing that closing the primary would return the state to the days of Jim Crow when African American voters were denied full participation in the primary of the then dominant Democratic Party.

Judge Mary G. Lewis ruled, “The RP Greenville....

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