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INDEPENDENT VOTERS TO DELIVER LETTER TO COMMISSION MEMBERS AT DENVER HEARING:

1,000 CITIZENS SIGNED LETTER CALLING TO INCLUDE INDEPENDENT'S CONCERNS IN COMMISSION MANDATE

Independent voters from Colorado, Nevada, California, Oregon, Utah, Arizona and New York, all part of the national IndependentVoting.org network, will present a letter signed by 1,000 independents representing every state, and offer testimony about the barriers independents face to full participation in the election process before the Presidential Commission on Election Administration public hearing Thursday, August 8, 2013 at the History Colorado Center auditorium, 1200 Broadway, in Denver from 9:00 am – 5:00 pm.

The letter which will be delivered by Colorado independents reads:

We, the undersigned, are independent voters from all 50 states. We are deeply concerned that America's political process is in a crisis and that serious attention must be paid to it.

We are glad that President Obama has formed a commission to look at some of the defects in the electoral process, though we feel the narrow mandate of the Commission falls short of the public debate we need to have. One example of these shortcomings is that there are specific defects that affect independent voters which the Commission does not seem prepared to address. With 40% of Americans now identifying as independent, this should be a Commission priority.

Independents are not accorded the same courtesies and privileges as members of political parties, such as receiving mailed ballots at home or having the right to serve as poll workers on Election Day. During primary season, where some states permit us to vote, we come face to face with poll workers who do not understand their own rules and frequently misinform us about our voting rights. We have no representation on the Federal Elections Commission or Boards of Elections, and are often required to register to vote as "unenrolled" or "undeclared" voters, not as the independents that we are. In many states, we are barred from primary voting altogether, even though we – as taxpayers – finance those closed party primaries.

As you go about your work to identify and recommend improvements to the voting experience, we urge you to recognize that the American people want a more non-partisan form of politics at every level. Please use the power the President has given you to be open and responsive to this need!

"Our voices count too," added Ruth Nielsen of Black Hawk, CO in her comments to the Commission. "The democratic process doesn't work unless everyone can participate. No group

(over)

should be disenfranchised.” Randy Fricke of New Castle, CO recommended the Commission consider an Independent Voting Rights Act to “correct these deficiencies and obstruction in the voting process for registered independents.”

Catana Barnes, founder and president of Independent Voters of Nevada, will testify about the barriers independents in Nevada face, and will deliver statements from Jason Olson, Director of IndependentVoice.org of California; Randy Miller of Utah League of Independent Voters, and others in the IndependentVoting.org network including Janelle Wood and Brenda Sperduti of Arizona and David Ellis of Oregon.

The Commission’s mandate is to study best practices in election administration, and present recommendations in six months of how to “improve the experience of all voters.” But independents are concerned its focus is narrow, targeting administrative items like how to decrease long voting lines. For independents who are barred in many states, including Colorado, from voting in primaries the issue is who gets to stand in the voting line.

New registration figures show that unaffiliated voters in Colorado outnumber Republicans and Democrats* and have broken the 1 million mark but they will not be permitted to vote in 2016 presidential caucuses and must declare themselves to be a Republican or Democrat to vote in state and local primaries. If they do so, they are subject to a waiting period (as are independents in Maine, New York and Arizona) before they can re-establish their independence. Of the 19 states still operating closed primaries systems, Colorado ranks 4th (behind Utah, Connecticut and Arizona) in the percentage of its electorate— nearly 35%—that are excluded.

Legislative efforts to rectify the situation failed in 2011 when a bill allowing unaffiliated voters to participate in primaries without having to give up their independent status was killed in committee. Secretary of State Gessler added a fiscal note saying the state could not afford the increased voter participation that would result had it passed.

Since 2011, 41 states have introduced 180 pieces of legislation to restrict voting rights including: reducing early voting periods, requiring proof of citizenship, or limiting access to registration or primary elections. These partisan battles are taking place in the courts as well. Last month the Democratic Party of Hawaii filed a lawsuit to force the state to close its primaries. Previously, it has been Republican organizations (in Idaho and South Carolina) who have taken to the courts with this aim.

Representatives of independent voter groups in Virginia, New York and Florida attended hearings in DC and Miami and submitted testimony. Local independent voter groups will also be attending hearings scheduled for Philadelphia (9/4) and Ohio (9/20).

“The fight for partisan advantage *is* what the political process has sadly become,” said IndependentVoting.org Dir. of Communications Sarah Lyons who is also testifying at the hearing. “Changing that is going to take a movement to get the partisanship out of politics—a movement of outsiders—and that’s why it’s so critical the voices of independents be heard by this Commission.”

* Colorado Secretary of State website: “Total Registered Voters by Party Affiliation and Status as of 3:21 AM on 8/1/2013” Unaffiliated 1,056,300; Republican , 993,650; Democrat 964,303.