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T H E P O L I T I C S O F B E C O M I N G



*GW Addresses
Major Party
Corruption*

It's Those Parties!
(And I'll Cry If I Want To)

JACQUELINE SALIT

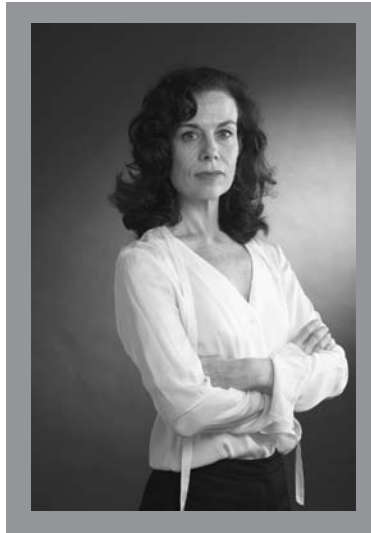
New Hampshire
Goes Independent

Dennis Kucinich
At The Threshold

Barack Obama
On The Move

Ron Paul Against
the Odds

Doug Bailey
On Unity08



IT'S A SNORE

By the time you read this note, the 2008 presidential primary and caucus season will have begun. What a relief! Finally, the election is in the hands of the voters. So perhaps this is a good moment to pause and think about our election process and some much needed reforms which have been blocked or stalled at the borders of the partisan political domain.

Oh no, you may be thinking. Not that again! Of course we need political reform – everyone knows that. But these issues just aren't sexy! They have no glamour, no drama, no emotion. Political reform is dry. It's not like money, sex and war, which excite our passions and compel our senses. Let's be frank. Political reform? It's a snore.

I consider myself a practical person and I think the independent movement is a practical movement. Yes, we have high ideals – if you think wanting a political system that isn't corrupt but is vibrantly democratic falls into the category of "high." To me it's more like "the way it's supposed to be." But I admit it's hard to get there, as even George Washington pointed out. He's crying on the cover because things didn't work

out that way. He held the parties responsible in 1796 and so do the 40% of Americans who call themselves independents today.

For years I thought I could turn political reform into a sexy issue. Unfortunately so many years have passed since I first aspired to this goal that I'm not the "babe" I once was. Acting as a kind of "spokesmodel" for political reform (as in *Take a look behind Door #3 – why, it's Instant Runoff Voting!*) is off the table, at least for me.

But political reform, while not glamorous on the surface, has a kind of inner beauty – and I don't mean that as a joke. It's akin to the infrastructure of a great building, or the ever-changing course of a mighty river, or the awesome engineering of a suspension bridge. The design of a structure dramatically shapes the way things – people, water, cars, life – move through it. The design of a political structure, the flow and function of a constitutional system, shapes the quality and character of the democracy that moves through it. Our electoral "rules and regulations" urgently need some redesign.

Forgive me if that outburst of metaphors was "over the top." In deference to the need to be practical – to

continued from previous page

confront our marketing challenges head on – I return to my earlier judgment on the nature of political reform. *It's a snore.* I decided to take the bull by the horns and create a political reform program called – can you guess? – A SNORE. Here it is.

Abolish the Electoral College. Shouldn't the American people elect our president directly?

Same Day Voter Registration. You're an American. You're 18 or older. You should be able to show up at the polls and vote.

Nonpartisan administration of elections. Bipartisan doesn't equal nonpartisan, especially when 40% of the country doesn't ally with a party. Yet from the Federal Election Commission down to local election supervisors, it's a game for Democrats and Republicans only. We need a new system to regulate elections that takes independents into account. And on that score, let's open up the presidential debates. Democrats and Republicans control the Commission on Presidential Debates and use partisan criteria to keep qualified independents out. *RocktheDebates.org* has been pushing the envelope here. Check it out.

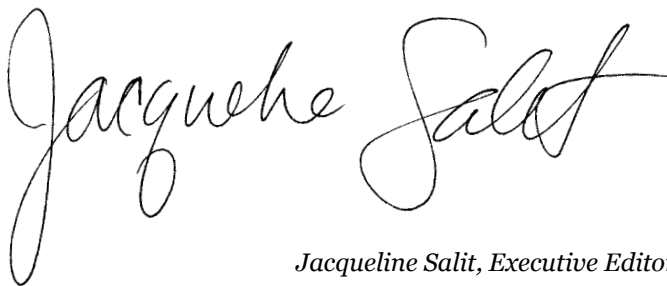
Open primaries. Half the states allow independents to vote in party primaries, sometimes known as first round voting. The rest do not. How can we justify a system that allows so many voters to be locked out of the first – and often decisive – round?

Redistricting reform. Legislators shouldn't get to pick their voters before the voters pick their legislators. We need a new nonpartisan system for drawing district lines.

Expand Initiative and Referendum. Half the states have some form of initiative or popular referendum process giving voters the right to "legislate" directly by putting policy proposals on the ballot. Let's give every voter that right and make sure that those who do have it, retain it.

Okay, there you have it. Political reform? It's A SNORE. In the branding world they call this hanging a lantern on your defects and getting out in front of your problem.

Independents are out in front, no question about that. As to our defects? We're the people who are independent because we don't like joining anything. Except that we're joining together. Go figure. Go vote. And if you're looking for some kicks, go home to your spouse or partner and have a good time.



Jacqueline Salit, Executive Editor

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THE NEO- INDEPENDENT

EXECUTIVE EDITOR: JACQUELINE SALIT

DEPUTY EDITOR: PHYLLIS GOLDBERG

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

OMAR ALI

DEBORAH GREEN

HARRY KRESKY

JIM MANGIA

FRED NEWMAN

ASSISTANT TO THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR:

LAUREN ROSS

RESEARCH: DAVID BELMONT, NANCY HANKS,
GWEN MANDELL

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GENERAL MANAGER: KIM SVOBODA

SALES: JOHN OPDYCKE

MARKETING: SARAH LYONS

COUNSEL: FRANCINE MILLER, ESQ.

ADDRESS: 400 C.P.W., #2R
NEW YORK, NY 10025

TELEPHONE: 212-691-0599

FAX: 212-609-2811

WEBSITE: www.neoindependent.com

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Notes from the Ground Up

Jacqueline Salit

I

I telephoned Betty Ward in New Hampshire the day before Thanksgiving to tell her that she made the cover of the *Christian Science Monitor*. The newspaper had conducted a series of lengthy interviews with independent voters in the Granite State – Ward among them – to portray the dynamics within this key constituency. These are the voters many believe will determine the outcome in the critical first-in-the-nation primary. A school teacher in Concord, Betty was surprised to hear that the article was on the front page, including a callout featuring her quote: “I would like to see somebody who cares more about the country than the party.”

We talked for awhile about the photographs that the *Monitor* chose – she had seen the piece two nights earlier in the online edition – and we tried to fathom how the photo department made its selections. “They took 300 pictures!” Betty told me. We laughed. But then her demeanor changed, a sudden seriousness erasing her dry New England humor. “Something is happening,” she said quietly. “Yes,” I said. “In the last six months, there’s a change,” she went on. “For the longest time, we worked and worked to find independents who wanted to get involved, who wanted to make a difference. And nothing happened. But now, something’s changed.” Betty paused. “Maybe it’s history,” she reflected. “Maybe that’s what it is.”

II

For a year or more, there has been an abundance of public commentary, new political books, and speculation about a looming shift in American politics, one in which the two parties are challenged by a third force. Mainstream political commentators like Thomas Friedman, Peggy Noonan and David Brooks have all promoted the idea that a break from the two parties is imminent.

In May of 2006, Friedman wrote in the *New York Times*, “I’m hoping for a third party. The situation is ripe for one: America is facing a challenge as big as the cold war – how we satisfy our long-term energy needs, at reasonable prices, while decreasing our dependence on oil and the bad governments that export it – and neither party will offer a solution, because it requires sacrifice today for gain tomorrow.”

A month later, Noonan wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, “The Perot experience seemed to put an end to third-party fever. But I think it’s coming back, I think it’s going to grow, and I think the force behind it is unique in our history. The problem is not that the two parties are polarized,” she continued. “In many ways they’re closer than ever. The problem is that the parties in Washington, and the people on the ground in America, are polarized. There is an increasing and profound distance between the rulers of both parties

Among the numbers was the 47% of the black vote that peeled away from the Democratic Party in 2005 in New York City to vote for Mike Bloomberg, who ran on both the Independence Party and Republican Party lines.

and the people – between the elites and the grunts, between those in power and those who put them there.”

David Brooks wrote in the *New York Times* in October of 2006, “If you look at the political landscape, identification with the Republican Party is falling but identification with the Democratic Party is not rising. Instead, there is a spike in the number of people who do not identify with either. People correctly perceive that neither party has a coherent agenda this year.”

There is a full complement of believers who predict that 2008 will see the birth of a third major party. These scenarios are often tied to hopes for an independent presidential run by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg or CNN commentator Lou Dobbs, or to a one-time independent fusion ticket nominated at a virtual convention under the auspices of Unity08.

But even as this chorus indicts the two-party system for ineffectiveness and irrelevance and predicts that a new force will erupt, the 2008 presidential election is shaping up to be the most purely “party vs. party” election in decades. The nuances of the candidates’ positions notwithstanding, the Republicans are the party of war, the Democrats are the party of peace. At the same time, the trend among American voters toward political independence is growing. Betty Ward is one of 372,934 undeclared voters in New Hampshire, 44% of the state’s electorate. National tracking polls put the number of independents at roughly 35% of the population. A *USA TODAY*/Gallup poll conducted in July indicates that 58% of Americans would like to see a third party in the mix.

It’s as if a portion of the American public, taking that small step to shape a new social and political order by becoming independent, has not yet amassed either the strength or the collective will to create a course correction. Meanwhile, the 2008 presidential election takes on the character of a heavyweight title fight, where both contestants – exhausted by the exercise of their own strength – fight on to the bitter end. If on Election Day 2008 the country remains split down the middle (many insiders are predicting a 51/49 finish), the White House will be occupied by the person and the party who won the title by decision. If public resentment over the Iraq war and the inability of the GOP to represent the national interest spirals out of control, the Democrats could win in a landslide, a knockout. The choices independent voters make could well determine the winner of the championship bout.

III

I recently spoke with a writer at the *Miami Herald* working on a series about the new trends towards political independence among younger African Americans and Latinos. He picked up on this story because he and his friends and colleagues – many are thirty-something professionals of color – are either registered or self-identify as independents. He was curious to discover whether his personal experience was part of a larger pattern. I told him that it was and offered him data and election results as evidence. Among the numbers was the 47% of the black vote that peeled away from the Democratic Party in 2005 in New York City to vote for Mike Bloomberg, who ran on both the Independence Party and Republican Party lines. The reporter, who takes pride in being up on the latest cultural and political trends in black America (and in New York in particular, given the Big Apple's role as the pacesetter for black culture), was startled that he'd never seen this statistic reported. I explained to him that it had been reported once in the *New York Times* and once in *U.S. News and World Report* and then promptly forgotten, or buried, take your pick.

During the summer I completed work on an epilogue I'd written for a book to be published by a university press on the history of black America's involvement in independent and third-party movements. I'd been contracted to write a postscript that dealt specifically with the Bloomberg 2005 experience and the anatomy of this black electoral revolution. The book's main author, a good friend and talented historian, had traced the course of independent realignments by black activists and voters throughout American history, beginning with the entry of the abolitionists into electoral politics through the founding of the Liberty Party, later forming part of the coalition that eventually became the Republican Party, which was consolidated with the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. His narrative carried the story through post-Reconstruction populism, communist and socialist efforts to create independent electoral parties in the 1920s, '30s and '40s, and new left efforts at radical electoral alternatives in the 1960s and '70s.

The final chapter was to cover the 1980s and '90s and the emergence of contemporary independent electoral tactics that mobilized the black community away from the Democratic Party. My postscript was to cap that historical account with an insider's view of the black realignment that had occurred in New York in 2005. However, as publication neared, the press had second thoughts about my contribution to the book and decided to publish the historical survey up to and including the

Perot candidacy of 1992, but end the story there. The contemporary turn was deleted on the grounds that it was too political and insufficiently historical. The message here? Hold on to my chapter for a hundred years, at which point it should be eminently publishable.

IV

My communications director, Sarah Lyons, sent me the following report on a New York City forum at Baruch College, featuring a number of political pollsters, most notably Douglas Schoen, with whom I had worked on the Independence Party's campaign for Mike Bloomberg. Here's what Sarah described:

At the "Parsing the Polls" forum, there was interest in hearing the panelists read the tea leaves of the 2008 presidential contest and the moderator steered the discussion in that direction. But after an hour and a half of dialogue covering everything from national to local polls, from likely winners in early states to esoteric factors such as "likeability," almost nothing had been said about independent voters.

When the floor was opened for questions, I asked the following after first identifying myself as an independent: I referenced the Wall Street Journal/NBC poll that showed 42% of Americans self-identified as independent and the 2006 mid-term elections where independents were openly credited with swinging control of Congress. Given that, I asked the pollsters, what were they doing to develop a methodology to better understand who these Americans are, and why, in spite of the fact that they typically have to vote for Democrats and Republicans, they continue to assert their independence?

The moderator, Michelene Blum, who is the new director of Baruch's Survey Research Unit, was quick to say: "Believe me, people are looking at that" but didn't elaborate. Kellyann Conway, president and CEO of The Polling Company (Fred Thompson is a client), put in a plug for "ideology," saying it tended to be more important to voters than partisan affiliation. Doug Schoen prefaced his remarks by saying to me: "You're obviously a devotee of independent politics in addition to being an independent yourself." He went on to suggest that it's getting tougher and tougher to be partisan, that a lot of people are simply doing what Mike Bloomberg did in becoming independent and are saying I've had it with being in a partisan system. It was Schoen's opinion that Bloomberg would not be entering the presidential race.

V

Two conversations of political interest have surfaced so far during the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. The first is framed in *Supercapitalism* by Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor under President Bill Clinton (perhaps soon to be known as Clinton 42 if his wife is elected president and becomes Clinton 44). Reich is an economist, and he identifies what he sees as the most urgent danger facing the country – namely the divergence between contemporary capitalism – “supercapitalism” – and democracy. In order to restore the proper checks and balances between the two, Americans must effect a separation between them – a regulatory wall, as it were – that will allow both to flourish. Here are some brief excerpts from an interview with Reich, circulated by Random House, his publisher.

Q: Why is democracy failing?

A: Because supercapitalism has overwhelmed politics. Remember, companies are in more intense competition than ever. Goaded by us, they have to do whatever is necessary to gain and keep competitive advantage. What drives this escalation is the fact that public policies often help some companies or industries while putting rivals at a disadvantage. As competition has intensified, so has this arms race. It's no coincidence that there has been a mammoth increase in Washington lobbyists over the last twenty-five years (from 5,500 to over 32,000), Washington lawyers (26,000 to 77,000), corporate public relations specialists, and corporate-related campaign contributions.

Q: What can be done?

A: The real challenge is to keep the two realms – capitalism and democracy – separate. We have to end the corporate arms race. That means strict limits on corporate lobbying, on corporate spending for public relations intended to influence legislation, on legislators and public officials turning to lobbying when they leave office, and on corporate money otherwise flowing in politics.

Q: Are you optimistic?

A: Yes. While the triumph of supercapitalism has led, indirectly and unwittingly, to the decline of democracy, it's not inevitable. We can have a vibrant

democracy as well as vibrant capitalism. But to accomplish this, the two spheres must be kept distinct. The purpose of capitalism is to get the best deals for consumers and investors. The purpose of democracy is to accomplish ends we can't achieve as individuals – and to set the rules of the capitalist game. We're all consumers and many of us are investors, but these private benefits often come with social costs. We're also citizens who have a right and a responsibility to participate in a democracy, and reduce those social costs. We can accomplish this larger feat only if we take our roles as citizens seriously, and protect our democracy. The first step, which is often the hardest, is to get our thinking straight.

Reich tells us that “the purpose of democracy is to accomplish ends we can't achieve as individuals – and to set the rules of the capitalist game.” But as optimistic as Reich might be, he is remarkably unconcerned with a distinctive feature of our democratic system, namely that the entire regulatory matrix that controls electoral activity is itself controlled by the two major parties. In other words, the policymakers to whom Reich would have us turn to act as reformers are responsible for having unleashed supercapitalism in the first place.

One accounting for why
so many Americans have
become independents
and why 58% would like
to see a third major party
is that few feel confident
that the parties will
reform themselves.

Reich might expect the parties to reform the “rules of the capitalist game” themselves, but it’s not at all clear that the American people do.

One accounting for why so many Americans have become independents and why 58% would like to see a third major party is that few feel confident that the parties will reform themselves. It seems increasingly clear to a lot of us that absent an independent “third force,” the rules will remain roughly the same. Clintonism – the political philosophy of triangulation – was an effort to support unfettered globalization while maintaining a liberal (democratic) facade. And this was a bipartisan project. It was under Clinton 42 and Bush 43 that democracy became so utterly degraded, that bitterness and partisanship eclipsed political discourse, while the corporate sector was allowed to “overwhelm” the political process, as Reich amply demonstrates in *Supercapitalism*. This concern is one that animates independents – a fact that should have at least caught Reich’s eye, but didn’t.

We do catch the eye of Ronald Brownstein in *The Second Civil War: How Extreme Partisanship Has Paralyzed Washington and Polarized America*. Unlike Reich, who focuses mostly on economic transformations over the last 40 to 50 years, Brownstein examines political transformations of the same period, notably what he calls “the great sorting out” in which the previously ideologically mixed Republican and Democratic parties became homogenized as conservatives migrated to the GOP and the Democrats became aggressively liberal.

Brownstein reports that some mid-20th century critics argued in favor of this kind of political purification on the grounds that it would define choices more clearly and thereby stimulate voter involvement. But Brownstein himself believes that this “great sorting out” has polarized and partisanized American politics to the detriment of our democracy, largely because the policy compromises necessary to address critical social and economic problems have been sidelined by the hyper-competition for partisan advantage. Brownstein holds Gingrich-era Republicans responsible for escalating the conflict, singling out former Speaker Tom DeLay, who drove a conservative agenda through Congress with razor-thin margins. But he also calls the Democrats to account, arguing that they were emulating the “...Republican model. The Democrats have not been the principal engine of polarization, but they

have not been immune to its effects either.”

Unlike Reich, Brownstein turns (albeit gingerly) to independents for relief. Prominent on his list of necessary political reforms is a system of open primaries. Closed primaries, in which only party members may vote, “magnify the influence of hard-core partisans, which means, after the great sorting out, that they also magnify the influence of the most ideological voters on each side. The best way to dilute the influence of the base,” he says, “is to abandon closed primaries.”

Brownstein understands that the road to achieving open primaries is a twisted one. “Allowing more independents to vote in party primaries is a straightforward destination, but it’s not easy to map out a route to reach it. Lawyers in both parties agree that Supreme Court rulings have left state parties with the last word on who participates in their primaries. And state parties, dominated by partisans, are the last institutions that will see the value of opening decisions to less partisan voices.”

Brownstein sees the march forward led by anti-partisans and moderates in the major parties. Independents, by contrast, see it led by a “third force” – organized independents banging on the gates of the citadel to demand a reworking of the bipartisan political order. That’s one reason independents are increasingly focused on building our own political power base and not simply subsuming ourselves as swing voters in electoral coalitions of one kind or another.

VI

It is ironic that independents, ostracized, marginalized or courted as we may be, are called upon by Brownstein to salvage the two-party system we have protested by becoming independents. Ironical, too, that the American people are called upon by Reich to salvage our democracy after being sidelined to allow for the expansion of supercapitalism, which, according to Reich, wrecked it in the first place. But these kinds of contradictions are commonplace in our 21st century postmodern world. The question for the independent movement is how we grow and develop in that context. That’s our challenge – one that goes far beyond the outcome of the 2008 presidential election. Maybe, as Betty Ward said, it’s history. NEO-

*A Washington insider goes outside to offer
the American people new choices.
Talking to independents is part of his mandate.*

Why Unity08!

Doug Bailey

All of the ten million voting members who will gather together next June in the first-ever online convention to nominate America's next president will have their own story of frustration that brought them there.

Here's mine.

For 20 years (1966-86) John Deardourff and I helped elect over 50 statewide winners from Vermont to Texas and virtually everywhere in between. Over three dozen times we helped elect a governor. Most were really good; all governed the only way two-party government can work – finding enough common ground between some elected leaders in both parties to make progress on the serious stuff.

For the last 60 years of the 20th century that was Washington's formula too. Truman + Vandenburg = the Marshall Plan. LBJ + Dirksen = a civil rights law. Reagan + O'Neill = Social Security refunding. The Soviet Union + common sense = politics stopping at the water's edge. Public service + common ground = American progress.

In fact, since the New Deal I can't name a single major, successful and sustainable policy initiative, foreign or domestic, that didn't happen in part because of some measure of support from both parties. Can you? I have digressed, but I'll come back to it. So will the country; it must.

I quit campaign consulting in 1987 because things had gotten so negative, but little did I know. By 2000 the basic formula in all Bailey/Deardourff campaigns (get to 50% plus 1 by bringing along our own party and going to the independents for the winning margin) had been replaced by a nearly opposite approach (get to 50% plus 1 by identifying your party's hardcore base, pander to it on its emotional issues, micro-target to expand that base, whip them up even more by negative attacks on the other side, and turn out every last one of them – without ever talking to the independent voters or their issues at all).

The political machine that Rove drove certainly would and did produce both turnout and a winner. Presidential turnout soared in 2004 because of brilliant



Actor Sam Waterston, Unity08 spokesman

turnout efforts by both parties. The Kerry Democrats had the best turnout organization in modern political history save one – and, of course, lost to that one.

If you never talk to independent voters in the campaign, you have no mandate from them when you win. Without a mandate, all a president's "political capital" amounts to little. And members of Congress who never talked to the issues of the independents in the campaign find it next to impossible to find common ground on those issues with those from across the aisle who didn't have that contact either. Of course, that might not matter much if it weren't for the fact that what interests the independents are the issues crucial to America's future.

Five other things happening at the same time have helped make the most powerful government in the history of the world "dangerously dysfunctional" – to use Alan Greenspan's words. (a) Computerized gerrymandering has left most House members vulnerable only to a primary challenge from their own party's base, which they therefore coddle further. (b) Lobbyists after earmarks, and more, fund incumbents to the point where challenging them seems futile. (c) Starting after 1994, Newt Gingrich told new members that there was so much work to do they should leave their spouses back home, thereby destroying the inter-party social network that fertilized the common ground. (d) Cable TV and the Internet fed both the trend toward niche communications with your base and "gotcha" punditry that belittles complicated issues and serious public service alike. (e) Polling has seemed so reliable that it's hard to realize that once upon a time politicians would actually say what they believed and stumble into leadership.

So, here we are. We face more issues crucial to our future safety and well-being than at any time in our

lifetime. Washington and the two parties seem totally unable to find or even seek common ground on any of them. And 55% to 60% of our people have no hard commitment to either party, have deep concerns for the future of their country, and have nowhere to turn.

That is "Why Unity08." Now *what* is Unity08?

Unity08 is what every American generation provides – a rebirth of freedom on its own terms for its own times. With your help it will combine our oldest values and our newest technology to renew the American community.

Together, millions of us will do five things:

1. In June 2008 hold the first-ever online convention open to every registered voter in America, regardless of party.
2. At that convention, nominate a Unity Ticket for President and Vice President (one Republican and one Democrat, in whichever order – or an Independent with a Unity Team including members of both major parties).
3. Select the crucial issues facing the country – and the key questions on them – and demand that the candidate answers also be candid answers.
4. Achieve ballot access for the Unity08 ticket in all 50 states. (Tough, but achievable, with your help.)
5. In November 2008 ensure the election of the Unity Ticket to the White House by the votes of all who are ready to reignite America's torch of freedom.

Bold? Yes. Audacious? Yes. Doable? Yes. In fact it is nothing less than what America always does in a moment of truth. We come together to find common ground for the common good.

Washington doesn't know it yet but politics-as-usual is dead.

You can make it happen. Be a member. Be a recruiter. Be a volunteer. Be a local organizer of a hi-tech/hi-touch army for ballot access. Be a donor. Be a re-founding father of the re-United States of America. See you at www.Unity08.com. NEO

Doug Bailey is a co-founder of Unity08 and a member of the organization's Founders' Council. A veteran political consultant, in 1987 he founded The Hotline, a daily political briefing published in Washington, DC.

*When activists join with voters to initiate tax reform,
they shouldn't find themselves in handcuffs.
In Oklahoma, three of them just did.*

Oklahoma Overreaches

Kim Wright

Oklahoma government has set a new precedent, or perhaps stooped to a new low, by challenging the rights of citizens to control their government through the initiative process. On October 2, 2007 Attorney General Drew Edmondson issued felony indictments against three prominent individuals involved in the 2006 taxpayers' bill of rights (TABOR) petition drive. Paul Jacob, a national leader of the term limits movement, Susan Johnson, head of the signature-gathering company National Voter Outreach, and Rick Carpenter, director of Oklahomans in Action, are accused of "willfully, corruptly, deceitfully, fraudulently and feloniously" conspiring with each other to defraud the state through the collection of signatures. If convicted, they could be imprisoned for ten years. Clearly, this is a very serious matter for them, for the citizens of Oklahoma, and quite likely for all U.S. citizens.

Current state law requires that petition circulators be residents of Oklahoma. The State Election Board defines a resident as "any U.S. citizen entering Oklahoma with the intent to reside." (Although I am neither a politician nor an English major, I find this a

The message to citizens
was very clear when
sheriff's deputies
handcuffed and hauled
away Jacob, Johnson
and Carpenter before
they could make a
statement at a press
conference following
their arraignment.

rather vague, nondescript definition.) Oklahoma does not have a residency requirement for voting, although one must register 25 days prior to the election. The residency requirement for petition circulators is left to interpretation. (I suspect that the “interpretation” may be dependent upon the content of the initiative.) In the TABOR case, petition circulators declared themselves residents of Oklahoma. Yet the attorney general has suggested that the organizers’ efforts were a scheme to manipulate the state’s election laws. These charges – and the attendant publicity – serve to intimidate and stifle the voice of Oklahoma citizens. Paul Jacob underscores this sentiment: “This prosecution is purposely draconian, designed to scare and intimidate people away from the citizen initiative process. To face 10 years in prison following what you understand to be the rules of the petition drive sends a chilling message, not only throughout Oklahoma but throughout the country. That’s not what we want people to be thinking about when they consider whether to join a campaign to reform their government.”

The message to citizens was very clear when sheriff’s deputies handcuffed and hauled away Jacob, Johnson and Carpenter before they could make a statement at a press conference following their arraignment. Since when are law-abiding citizens treated like the common criminals on *America’s Most Wanted*? Of course, the threat of prosecution will deter Oklahomans from exercising their right to petition. All Americans, to the extent they value their democratic rights, are jeopardized by the potential consequences if Edmondson and his cohorts in Oklahoma are allowed to get away with destroying the liberties of these three innocent people.

I have had the opportunity to talk with Susan Johnson about the TABOR petition drive and the subsequent fallout. Neither the media nor the attorney general has mentioned the petition blockers. I wonder why residency rules don’t apply to those individuals who were brought in from other states and paid to block and harass petition gatherers by stalking, interrupting and yelling at a petitioner? Has the attorney general investigated the constitutionality of this process? Linda Curtis of Independent Texans suggests that “none of these politicians seems concerned one whit” about these petition blockers and that “now Edmondson seems to be out to kill Oklahomans’ initiative process.”

Across the country people are speaking out in support of the “Oklahoma Three.” In his recent article in *Forbes* magazine (“Has North Korea Annexed Oklahoma?”), Steve Forbes states: “The Oklahoma case stands out as an extreme move to restrict the behavior of political activists.” A November 19 editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* goes so far as to say: “Mr. Edmondson has his eye on higher office, and indicting TABOR supporters will win him friends among unions and liberal interest groups that can sway a fight for the Democratic nomination.”

In Oklahoma, State Rep. Charles Key calls the indictments “a grotesque abuse of Edmondson’s office.” State Sen. Randy Brogdon declared the attorney general to be “more concerned with protecting his own political power than he is with preserving, protecting and defending the right of Oklahomans to free speech.” Oklahoma independent voters are collectively signing an open letter to the governor asking him to intervene. We must protect the right of citizens to utilize the initiative process to petition their government. In Oklahoma, some politicians seem determined to make that process an obstacle course in order to deny citizens their right to participate. NEO



Kim Wright is a founder of Independent Voters of Oklahoma, where she moved earlier this year. In 2006 she ran for the Missouri State Senate as an independent and got more than 36% of the vote.

Griffin and Obama: Change Is In The Air

Phyllis Goldberg

When Wayne Griffin started South Carolina Independents for Obama earlier this year, he was defying the Conventional Wisdom. Back then Hillary Clinton looked to be the inevitable front runner, Barack Obama a long shot at best. In South Carolina – the first state to secede from the Union, the state where the first shots of the Civil War had been fired – it seemed inconceivable to many people that a black man could win the Democratic primary, despite the fact that generally half the voters in that primary are African American. The smart money was on Hillary, and most black elected officials, here as elsewhere, weren't even hedging their bets. All the polls indicated that black voters were prepared to bet on her too.



Wayne Griffin

But Griffin, the founder and chairman of the Independence Party of South Carolina, who was elected to the Greer City Council as an independent, has been running ahead of the Conventional Wisdom for nearly 20 years. Now, with Obama surging in the polls both nationally and in this pivotal early primary state, where his joint appearance with

Oprah Winfrey on December 9 drew an unprecedented crowd of 25,000 people, black and white, Republicans, Democrats, and independents, it looks as if the C. W. (and perhaps Barack Obama as well) may be catching up to Wayne Griffin.

In mid-December a Rasmussen poll indicated that Obama had 51% of South Carolina's African American vote, while Clinton had 27%.

"He mentioned independents three times," said Griffin, who attended the Oprah-Obama rally. "He was acknowledging that he needs independents...I thought that was

important. One of the themes of his speech was change, not business as usual. He said he was glad that he's 'inexperienced' in the way that Washington does business."

Ask Wayne Griffin about his own political lineage, and he laughs. His parents, textile mill workers in Greer, the small city in the northwest corner of the state where Griffin still lives, "were – and are – lifelong Democrats," he says. So too are his three brothers and three sisters. And so was Griffin himself, until the day in 1988 when "a white man came to the door and asked me why" and he, Griffin, "ran out of answers pretty quickly."

His visitor was the southern regional coordinator of Lenora Fulani's first independent presidential run; Griffin signed on to her precedent-setting campaign for fair elections – in which Fulani became the first African American and first woman in U.S. history to access the presidential ballot in all 50 states – and has been an ardent independent ever since. He was a founder of the national Patriot Party, which emerged from a fusion of Perot supporters with black and progressive veterans of the Fulani campaign and eventually merged into the national Reform Party. In 1998 Griffin was elected for the first time to Greer's six-member City Council; he remains the Council's only African American member as well as its only independent. Griffin is an early pioneer of a new electoral coalition, sometimes called the black and independent alliance.

Ask him why he is an independent, and he doesn't hesitate: "Because I'm tired of the way the major parties do business, regardless of who's in power," he says bluntly. "Things are right on the cusp of change. You can feel it in the air. I think people are fed up with both parties. People are looking for answers from government, not to fight government."



The Obamas and Oprah on the campaign trail.

Fighting government – or rather its party surrogates – is precisely what independents often find themselves having to do. A case in point is the back-and-forth over fusion that took place earlier this year in South Carolina, one of only seven states in the country that permit candidates to run on more than one party line. With fusion, independent and third-party voters have demonstrable bargaining power with major party candidates who need their support to win elections; when local legislators sought to do away with fusion by amending state election law, Griffin jumped into the fray to preserve it.

“Fusion voting is critical to giving black voters new options in electoral politics,” Griffin wrote in a letter co-signed by Fulani to members of the House Judiciary Committee, part of his campaign urging them to reject the anti-fusion legislation. The bill was subsequently tabled after a black Democratic committee member intervened.

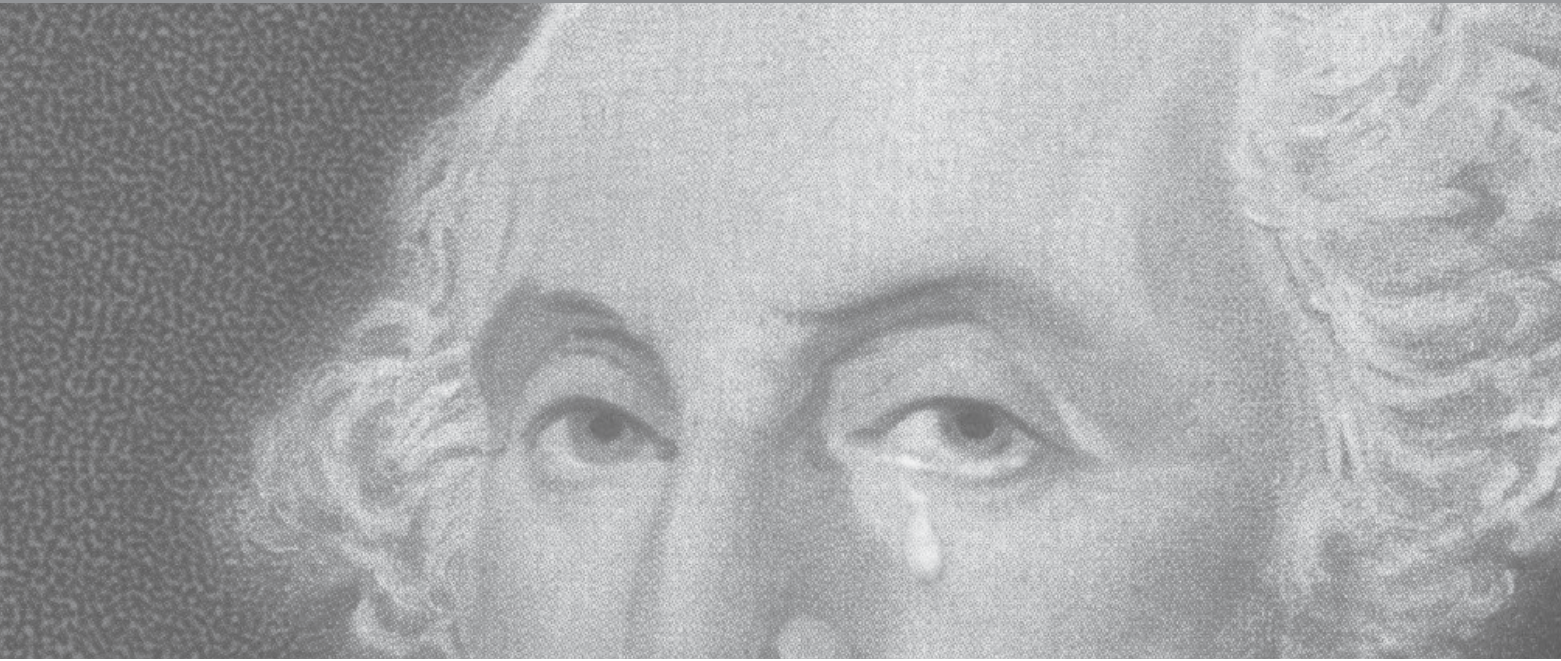
No one can predict whether and how Oprah’s star power will be reflected in the results of the Democratic primary on January 26. Nor can anyone foretell what independents – who typically make up about half of Democratic Party primary voters in South Carolina, one of some two

dozen states with open primaries – will do when they get to the polls.

Griffin – married, the father of two daughters, and the proprietor of a busy insurance business – is hard at work encouraging “independents of all hues” to vote for the junior senator from Illinois.

“I think he brings a fresh perspective,” Griffin says of Obama, who jolted Conventional Wisdom himself simply by running. “He was against the war when it was unpopular to be against the war. He staked his position very early, regardless of what the establishment had to say. One of the things he has to offer independents is his independence. He has the ability to work in a nonpartisan manner. That’s part of his allure. I don’t think he would be so close to Hillary in fundraising otherwise. I think the split between the two of them is a good thing for African Americans. We need to learn that we have choices. We’re an important voting bloc – we bring something of substance to the table. Nobody should automatically assume that they have our vote.” **NEO**

Phyllis Goldberg is deputy editor of The Neo-Independent.



What did George Washington see that is now coming into focus for tens of millions of 21st century Americans? In her keynote talk at an October meeting of independents sponsored by the New Hampshire Committee for an Independent Voice (NH-CIV), Neo editor Jacqueline Salit remembers that the father of our country warned the nation about the dangers inherent in political parties. The danger? Parties are by their nature partisan; that is, they inevitably come to care more about protecting their own particular interests than they do about serving the interests of the country, the people, as a whole.

Today a growing number of Americans are coming to believe that George Washington was right, spurring unprecedented numbers to identify their political status as “independent,” “undeclared,” “decline to state,” “unaffiliated” and the like.

Discomfited by this unpredictable development, the parties are resisting these changes

through a variety of means, including attempts to restrict the rights of independents voting in open primaries, and in some cases, doing away with open primaries altogether.

This year, when New Hampshire has once again been transformed into a stage on which the presidential candidates make their case to the voters, independents – under the umbrella of NH-CIV – have been staging their own sort of political theatre, engaging the candidates with unscripted questions and letting them know that independents are a distinctive force with a distinctive agenda.

The meeting sponsored by NH-CIV was attended by 100 independents from New Hampshire and nearby states. Salit’s talk is reprinted here, along with a Christian Science Monitor report on New Hampshire’s independent voters that features four leaders of NH-CIV.

It's Those Parties! (And I'll Cry If I Want To)

Jacqueline Salit

The historian Joseph Ellis wrote a terrific book about America's first president called *His Excellency, George Washington*. Ellis tells the story of how Washington – with our fledgling nation – together developed their character in the context of fighting a war for independence.

Ellis observes, “Washington was not clairvoyant about history's destination – But he did realize from the start that, wherever history was headed, he and America were going there together.”

Together, they fought the War for Independence and won, although they lost almost every battle along the way. They defeated the British, and established a radical experiment in democratic governance called America. Washington became our first president, and he is highly revered today – as, in my opinion, he should be. But while he is revered and celebrated, very little mention is made of what he said to the people of this country after he won the war for independence, after he founded our nation, and after he served two terms as president.

With all of that experience, with his character and wisdom and insight shaped in the crucible of the American revolution, when he delivered his Farewell Address to the nation in 1796, what did he say? What advice did he give to us so that we might continue the great democratic experiment that had riveted the world? He said – Look out for those political parties! He warned his fellow citizens about the “baneful effects of the spirit of parties.” He said that political parties and the partisanship and sectarianism they engender are the “worst enemy of a popular democracy.”

Parties are not contemplated or mentioned in the Constitution. But they rose up quickly, and Washington saw immediately the kinds of problems they would create. Here's what he said: “Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally. This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind. It exists under different shapes in all governments, more or less stifled, con-

CARLENE GODFREY/VISIONS BY CARLENE



From left to right: Members of NH-CIV Russ Ouellette, Betty Ward, Kathy Briggs; Neo's Jacqueline Salit; Andre Gibeau (NH-CIV); and Fran Miller from the Committee for a Unified Independent Party.

trolled, or repressed; but in those of the popular form it is seen in its greatest rankness and is truly their worst enemy..."

Beware the parties, he said. But we didn't listen. Children often don't listen to their parents, as I'm sure many in this room know. It's only when children grow up that they discover that their parents were right about a lot of things. And if George Washington were speaking here today, the opening line of his talk would be "Ladies and Gentlemen, with all due respect, I told you so!"

Now it's 2007 – more than 200 years after Washington's Farewell Address – and we're fighting a new War for Independence – we're fighting to empower the independent voter. And we've come to Hollis, New Hampshire today to talk about that and to showcase that.

Much is made about the influence of independents these days. In New Hampshire, independents are 44% of the electorate. That's up from 28% in 1996. The newspapers write articles about us. The *New York Times* had a big one last week – all about how many independents there are and how in the year 2000, 65% of independents cast ballots in the Republican primary

and now in 2008, it is expected that a similar percentage will cast ballots in the Democratic primary. They have charts that show how the independents voted, and endless permutations on that theme. That's the pundits' fascination – how we're going to impact on the outcome of the presidential race.

But in all of this coverage and polling, no one seems to want to probe the issue of why there are so many independents, given that almost everyone who votes is going to end up voting for a Democrat or a Republican. Why has the size of the independent voter bloc nearly doubled in the last ten years here in New Hampshire?

CARLENE GODFREY/VISIONS BY CARLENE



NH television and radio host Arnie Arneson (l.) with Betty Ward.

CARLENE GODFREY/VISIONS BY CARLENE



Senator Mike Gravel with Russ Ouellette.

Why do between 32% and 40% of the American people now self-identify as independents? Why do 41% of college students and 30% of young black adults all now call themselves independents? If the vast majority of independents are going to vote – if they vote – for a Democrat or a Republican, you have to ask, why does anyone bother to be an independent at all?

That's a good question – and I think we have an answer. It's not very glamorous or sensational. I think the 32-40% of the American people who call ourselves independents are making a statement. We're making a protest. We're saying – in our own personal way – that the Democrats and Republicans have taken control of the electoral process, that they run the show, that all we can do is vote for Democrats and Republicans, but we don't like them and so we're going to protest. We're going to check a different box on the voter registration form or the voter survey. We're going to be independents.

Now the critics might say – and they do! – *Oh, that doesn't mean anything.* And the pollsters are always trying to prove that it doesn't mean anything. They set up these polls and ask independents “How do you tend to vote? Democrat or Republican?” The respondent answers: “Democrat” or “Republican.” The pollster says – *Aha! You're not an independent! You're a leaner! You lean Democrat. You lean Republican.* A recent poll of independents by the University of New Hampshire concluded that 45% lean Democrat, 30% lean Republican, so they surmise there really aren't very many independents. They do these polls, put out their press releases, and then they go away.

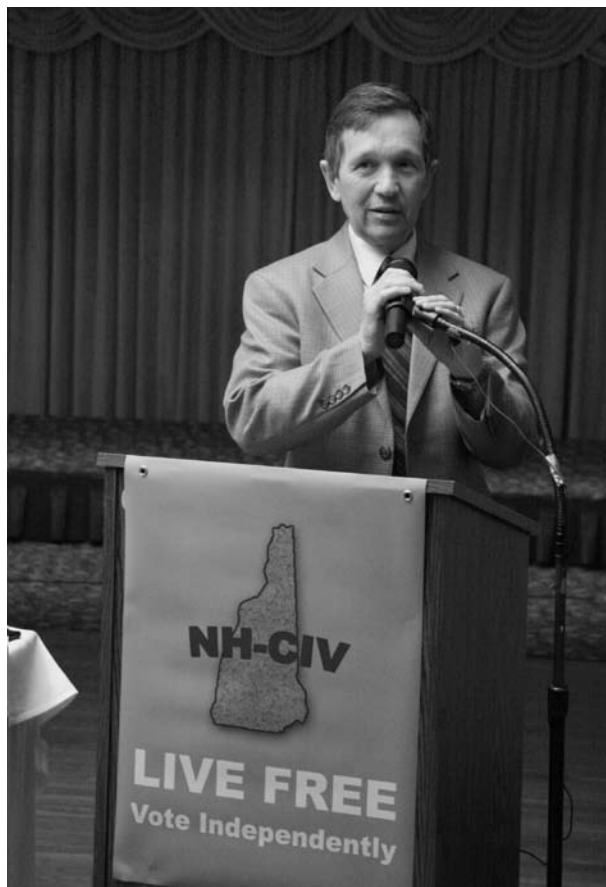
Now we just did our own poll. First, we asked the question the pollsters ask. We asked independents how they tend to vote. Our results showed 24% Democrat, 10% Republican, and 66% said it depends on the election. But then we asked one more question. We asked those who said they tended to vote one way or the other if, having done so, they still considered themselves to be independents. The results came back with 99% of the respondents saying, *Oh yes – I still consider myself an independent.* Well, I'm glad we bothered to ask!

Here's a question I'd love to put in the field. I'd like to ask Democratic and Republican voters the following question: If Abraham Lincoln were running for president today, would you be inclined to vote for him?

I expect a fairly high percentage would be. Let's say 60%. Then I'd put out a press release that said 60% of Democrats and Republicans lean independent!

But let's go back to the question we're asking here today. Why do people choose to call themselves independent? The answer is: because, at the moment,

CARLENE GODFREY/VISIONS BY CARLENE



Congressman Dennis Kucinich addresses the CIV forum.

George Washington and the American rebels he led did not know their destination when they started.

that's what we can do. When a group of Bostonians threw tea into the harbor in 1773 they were protesting the control over their political affairs exercised by a distant and increasingly alien power. At that point they couldn't overthrow that power and they hadn't yet come to the point where they were prepared to fully confront it. So, they protested it. When Betty Ward, or Russ Ouellette, or any of us, check the box that says unaligned, undeclared, I do not wish to enroll in a party, or tells a pollster "I'm an independent," we too are protesting the political control over our lives by a distant and increasingly alien power. We are saying: *We simply don't like these parties. We don't like what they're doing to our country. We don't like what they're doing to our health care system. We don't like what they're doing to our education system. We don't like how they've positioned us in the world.*

And that's why we have this incredible phenomenon where more than a third of our country has found a way to reject, to the degree possible, the tyranny of political parties. Our mission, pure and simple, is to give those Americans a way to move forward, to become architects and engineers of a revitalized democracy – as the title of today's event says – to make our voices heard.

I want to say a word about the presidential candidates who came here today, to spend time with CIV and Committee for a Unified Independent Party (CUIP) and the independent movement. Congressman

Dennis Kucinich and Senator Mike Gravel are both Democrats and both elected officials – one current and one former. In the course of organizing today's event, Russ, Betty and Andre talked with a lot of candidates, handlers and advance men, inviting the full gamut to come and address you. They pitched like crazy: Don't you know we're 44% of the electorate? Don't you know we're going to swing the election? Didn't you read the *New York Times*?

The candidates and their campaigns – Democratic and Republican – made their judgment calls, and we accept that. We recognize that it's a long campaign, that the road to making our country a better place is a long road, and we fully expect to see at least some of these other candidates along the way.

But it has to be noted that two presidential candidates did come here today. Yes, they have come here because they know 44% of New Hampshire voters are independents. Yes, they have come here because they are campaigning for those votes. But they've come here, I believe, for another reason as well. Though they are Democrats – as many Americans are – they've come here because they recognize that the changes that are needed in this country will not be brought about by the Democratic Party alone, nor by the party system as it is currently constructed.

They have come here, I believe, because they recognize that as progressive leaders, as progressive Democrats, they must have a connection to the independent movement as it grows. And it is growing. Indeed, I believe they are beginning to see that they must help that independent movement to grow, even if that means advocating positions which require that their party – the Democratic Party – and the Republican Party give up some of their privileges, and even if that means they take some heat from party leadership for hanging out with the people who checked the box that says *We don't like your parties, fellas.*

Today we are fighting the "baneful effects of the spirit of parties." Today we are building a new protest movement where calling yourself an independent has real meaning. Where are we headed? George Washington and the American rebels he led did not know their destination when they started. They only knew that history was their guide. We don't know our destination either. But wherever we are headed, we – and history – are going there together.

Thank you. NEO

The Christian Science Monitor

Ari Pinkus

Freethinking, unsure, fed up

November 20, 2007 — MANCHESTER and NASHUA, NH — As schoolteacher Betty Ward evaluates the 16 candidates running for president, uppermost in her mind is: Who will get US troops out of Iraq? She's mulling over whom to vote for.

Donna Richards will vote for someone who can be trusted and whose aim is to bring about peace. Her choice: undecided.

Attorney Andre Gibeau is seeking a candidate with courage to return to Congress much of the power he believes was usurped by President Bush.

Meet some of New Hampshire's freethinking and increasingly dissatisfied independents, who quite possibly hold the key to the first-in-the-nation presidential primary. They dwarf the ranks of registered Democrats or Republicans in this state. What they're thinking may well signal which themes will strike a chord with the roughly 20 percent of voters nationwide who consider themselves independents.

"New Hampshire will be a good test to see what [independents] find attractive on both sides," says Dante Scala, a political scientist at the University of New Hampshire in Durham.

Despite their diversity, New Hampshire's independents share some characteristics. They tend to be among the most fiscally conservative of the state's voters. The bad feelings they harbor toward the Bush administration's runaway spending have moved them further away from the GOP, and state polls consistently show they've been tilting toward the Democrats. But they're frustrated with the polarization in American politics and are increasingly dissatisfied with both parties for their inability to tackle America's most intractable problems.

"More than anything they have a lack of confidence in the political leadership," says Dick Bennett, head of American Research Group, a nonpartisan polling firm in Manchester.

Russ Ouellette is among those who have lost faith in political professionals and wants to hear candidates talk about wide-ranging reform. "We can't respond to hurricanes," says the business consultant from Bedford, N.H. "We're at war with an enemy that seems almost made up. We're supposed to live in fear all the time, yet go shopping to solve the problem."

In general, voters are feeling insecurity in nearly every area of their lives, Mr. Bennett says. "People go to work and when they return home they find gas is 7 cents higher."

In the current political environment, the message that resonates most is one that promises hope for a better future and solves such problems. A recurring theme in presidential elections, it's a far more important point to stress this time "because the world we live in is more complex," he adds.

Independents here say that they want a leader who is not only a problem solver but is also forward-thinking.

"I think whoever gets elected now will have a lot more responsibility to the future than presidents of the past," says Ms. Richards. "Before, the focus was on the economy: 'What can I have now?' I think with things like global warming, the depletion of our oil resources, Medicare and Social Security, the next president needs to be forward-thinking, a steward of the planet and the people on it and the programs so we're not headed for a wall...down the road."

But this can-do spirit should not come at the expense of empathy, she and others agree.

"I would like to see somebody who cares more about the country than the party, someone who really cares about the future of our children and the children I teach, like what does the future look like 15 if not 20 years down the road," says Ms. Ward, who voted for Republican John McCain in the 2000 primary and Democrat Howard Dean in the 2004 primary.

Independents are especially strong here because state rules allow them to pick up a ballot from either party on primary day, cast their vote, and then return to undeclared status before they leave the polls. Their numbers are growing. In 1992, they constituted 22 percent of the state's electorate, according to the Center for the Study of the American Electorate at American University in Washington. Now at 44 percent, they're far more numerous than registered Democrats (26 percent) and Republicans (30 percent).

Those numbers translate into real power. In 2006, independents helped unseat the state's two US representatives, reelect a Democratic governor, and give Democrats control of both houses in the state legislature for the first time since 1912.

But lately independents have become disenchanted with the Democratic Party because of a lack of action in Congress on a withdrawal plan from Iraq since the 2006 midterm elections, Bennett says.

"What our country is doing does not represent me as an American," Ward says. "I think there's a disconnect between what our policies are and what people want. In 2006, the election was to stop the war. To take the majority rule and make some impact... Now we might be going to Iran. The war hasn't stopped in Iraq."

Many of independents' votes are still up for grabs in the upcoming primary, which has not yet been officially scheduled. While 41 percent of the state's voters say they plan to vote in the Democratic primary, another 40 percent haven't decided which primary they will vote in, according to a poll taken last month by the New Hampshire Institute of Politics at Saint Anselm College in Manchester. Just 19 percent plan to participate in the GOP primary, the poll reported.

The growth of independents is mirrored nationwide. In 1960, only 1.6 percent of the electorate identified themselves as independent; in 2004, they accounted for 21.7 percent in the 28 states and the District of Columbia that register voters by party, according to the Center for the Study of the American Electorate.

Their numbers have swelled because many voters have become "dulled" by or have stopped believing in politics, says Curtis Gans, the center's director.

As the state waits for New Hampshire's secretary of state, Bill Gardner, to set the primary date, independents, in particular, say they are thankful that the election isn't tomorrow since they haven't found their candidate yet.

"I'm glad I don't have to decide yet. I have one little vote but to me it's very important," Richards says.

Ari Pinkus is a staff writer for the Christian Science Monitor.

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On candidates: in their own words...

Independent voters of all stripes share what kind of president they seek.

BETTY WARD, SCHOOLTEACHER:

"There's so many tiers of handlers. Like a corporation within itself. They're so guarded. They're so worried about winning. I just don't think all of this is real; it's almost surreal. I would like something really authentic. I want to feel that somebody up there has hope...I want to be inspired."

ANDRE GIBEAU, ATTORNEY:

"I want the professor candidate. I want the person who takes it all in and thinks about it and puts together the people to think about it."

RUSS OUELLETTE, CONSULTANT:

"There are bigger issues to talk about than who are you voting for. Let's talk about reform."

DONNA RICHARDS, SMALL-BUSINESS OWNER:

"What I'm looking for...has to do with who they are as a person and what their policies are, as well. It has to be someone who...will speak the truth and act according to what he or she has set forth as their core values or principles or policies. I think we've lost that...trust in our leaders. I think that's not only important to us as citizens of this country, but on the world stage they need to be credible."

— *The Christian Science Monitor*

On Friendship and Political Inspiration

Jim Mangia

In October several hundred Los Angeles nonprofit health care advocates and community residents packed the multi-purpose room in St. John's Well Child and Family Center on the corner of 58th and Hoover Streets (St. John's is a network of free community health centers and school-based clinics in south central L.A. that I direct) to hear a panel discussion on health care reform. The keynote was given by Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

From ending war as an instrument of foreign policy and universal nonprofit health care for every American, to immigrant rights and opening up the political process to new voices, Kucinich has been on the front lines of every progressive struggle vital to the future of America. I was first introduced to the Congressman by a close friend, Sharon Jimenez, a veteran of many political battles herself. And in the process of his second run for the presidency (as the conscience of the Democratic Party), Dennis Kucinich has become my friend.

In the month following the health care reform event, Kucinich came back to Los Angeles at my request to meet with Nativo Lopez, the president of the Mexican American Political Association, and Linda Curtis, director of Independent Texans. Soon afterwards, he flew to New Hampshire to speak to close to 100 independent activists in that bellwether primary state and also met in New York City with leaders and veterans of the independent political movement from around the country.



PHOTO: BOB JIMENEZ

Dennis Kucinich and Jim Mangia, co-chairman of California's IndependentVoice.org, who has connected the Congressman to independent voters.

This effort to introduce Congressman Kucinich to the circles in which I travel – as a longtime independent leader and the CEO of one of L.A.'s largest nonprofit health care organizations – is, to be blunt, part of a plan. Kucinich and I are working to forge a new alli-

ance to bring together progressive anti-war Democrats (long ignored and disrespected by the party hierarchy) with the millions of independent voters who are now coming alive as a major (and progressive) force in American politics.

Not only did independents swing the congressional mid-term elections to the Democrats last year, based on their widespread opposition to the war in Iraq, but they will dominate the outcome in key primary states (like New Hampshire) where they can vote in “open” party primaries. The connection I am intent upon building – between Dennis Kucinich and the growing amalgam of independent voters (now estimated by pollsters to be 42% of the electorate) – has significant potential.

It may be too early to say for sure, but as a 25-year political activist my sense is that we may succeed in building a new force (and, dare I say, a new majority) with a fresh and forward-looking outlook steeped in principle rather than expediency. Kucinich calls it a “democracy movement.” I concur, because in the most inspired traditions of our country, it is building bridges between diverse and distinct groups of Americans who differ on much, but agree on the need for a new, independent and progressive direction for our nation.

One of the dangers of being a political activist for so long is that you become hardened, even cynical, because you’ve seen so much political corruption and dishonesty among our country’s political elite. Career politicians will do and say anything to win, while the country continues to lose. But as a confirmed political cynic, I must confess that in Congressman Kucinich, I have met someone who has shown me a ray of hope that there are politicians in America who care more about the future of our country than where his (or her) next campaign contribution lies.

There’s nothing like making new (and lasting) friendships and building new (and lasting) movements to rid one of his or her cynicism and despair about America and about humanity itself. NEO

Jim Mangia, the Los Angeles-based co-chair of IndependentVoice.org, is an architect of Independent Primary.com, which is designed to heighten the profile of independent voters in the 2008 presidential election. A founding member of the national Reform Party, he was a member of the executive committee and served as the organization’s secretary for three consecutive terms.

“I’m *not* a protest candidate. I protest the war and I protest the inequalities of our society and I protest that one out of every three Americans doesn’t have the health care that he or she is entitled to. But I’m not a protest candidate.”

—Dennis Kucinich

At the Threshold

NEO Editor Jacqueline Salit Interviews Dennis Kucinich

NEO: I read the recent cover article in the *Progressive Magazine* where John Nichols puts forth a strategy recommendation for you. Essentially he says that you should not be running based on the message that you're out to win the nomination of the Democratic Party, but rather that you're running to accumulate delegates to conduct a platform fight at the Democratic convention and to act as a progressive watchdog on the Democratic nominee. In other words, he sees you as a protest candidate.

DK: First of all, I think that John Nichols is brilliant and I have a great deal of respect for him. And that's what I've already been doing. So what he's suggesting is not at odds with what I'm doing except to ask why would people be motivated to take a stand alongside of you, to stand for peace and the end of wars, getting out of Iraq and all the other things that I've been leading on, if you're only doing it to protest? Gene McCarthy made the [Vietnam] war an issue. That's what he ran on and he ran for president. He wasn't running as a protest candidate.

NEO: What do you see as the similarities between the moment of the McCarthy campaign and the moment that you're running now?

DK: Well, there's no comparison in terms of the public ferment. When McCarthy was a candidate in '67-'68, the country was embroiled in a great protest against what was happening in Vietnam. These times are different. There's not the kind of broad-based, open, collective public response that was obvious in 1968. It's

a different political climate. This political climate is a lot quieter. It doesn't mean the feelings don't run as deep, but it's quieter. So where war should be the thing that ignites people's passions to re-claim America and stop the attack on innocent people, it's not happening because there's fear. And the Democratic Party is fractured on the question of the war.

NEO: When you say the Democratic Party is fractured on the question of the war...

DK: You have Democrats who want to stay in Iraq. Some are candidates for president. It's almost unthinkable they would do this. But they make it clear that they are ready to stay in Iraq through 2013, without any changes whatsoever.

NEO: Perhaps a way to characterize what we're talking about here is that Nichols is saying, "Here's what it means to be an effective protest candidate," and you're saying that you see being a protest candidate in different terms.

DK: I'm *not* a protest candidate. I protest the war and I protest the inequalities of our society and I protest that one out of every three Americans doesn't have the health care that he or she is entitled to. But I'm not a protest candidate. If people want to send Washington a message, I'm available to do that. But the fact of the matter is that the minute that you put yourself in that category, you're not serious. And that's what our campaign has been doing. I represent the mainstream. I'm not coming from the fringes. The mainstream of America opposes this war. The mainstream of America

opposes an attack on Iran. The mainstream of America wants insurance that would come from a not-for-profit health care system covering everyone. I come from the mainstream. I don't come from the fringes.

NEO: Some are urging that you run as an independent after the Democratic primaries are over if you are not the Democratic nominee. There's been talk about whether you're going to partner with Congressman Ron Paul, a Republican, to do that. I'm assuming you've thought some about this.

DK: I want the Democratic Party to be an effective second party. We've forfeited *repeatedly* our opportunity to do that, by not getting us out of Iraq, by not challenging the insurance companies, by not challenging this administration's shredding of the Constitution. I continue to offer an alternative within the Democratic Party, as an independent force within the Democratic Party. Let's see if the American people want to do that. Let's see if they want an effective two-party system. Let's see if they want a Democratic Party that will fearlessly challenge the destruction of civil liberties and the erosion of our national vitality because we're in wars that are based on lies. This is up to the people. I've been inside the party for the better part of 40 years. That doesn't mean that my heart doesn't beat for a kind of fearless independent approach. That's where I come from. That's who I am. I want to see the Democratic Party become a viable expression of the practical aspirations of the American people, for jobs, for health care, for education for their children, and for peace.

NEO: Let me turn now to a conversation that I know you and Jim Mangia of *IndependentVoice.org* have been having. This is the building of a connection between progressive Democrats and independents and creating that "working relationship" as a step towards stimulating a new kind of progressivism. How do you think about that and to what extent are you seeking that out?

DK: Jim is aware and I'm aware of the shortcomings of the two-party system. The Democratic Party has missed an historic opportunity to hold the administration accountable for taking us into the war based on lies, for driving us into debt, for destroying civil liberties in this country. We really have an obligation to make the two-party system work. We're not doing it. That then gives rise to the feelings that people have all over this country: *Well, should an effort be made outside the two-party system?* And frankly, whenever the two-party system is not responsive, the American way produces a third party to challenge the political will. So, I think we may be at the threshold of that kind of thing again. And I

recognize it as being a direct outgrowth of the failure of party politics to address the practical aspirations of people, for jobs, for health care, for education, for a clean environment, for housing, for peace. These are all things that relate directly to people, to what people hope for in their government.

NEO: Even short of getting to the point where a third party emerges on the scene, we're talking here about using this political campaign to create some bridges, if you will, between the inside and the outside, between progressive Democrats on the inside and independents who are on the outside, now 40% of the country.

DK: I think that's happening. I think what's happening is that people who are independent-minded, independent-spirited – and those are people who may be Democrats, who may be Republicans and who may be true independents – are part of a ferment going on in America, where people are saying: *Is there a way to coalesce to be able to address the practical aspirations of people?* And again, jobs, health care, housing, environment, peace, retirement security. These are all things that relate to people. And if the two-party system doesn't do its job, people will look for alternatives. And they should, when the parties don't function. So while I'm a Democrat, I don't feel that any party deserves to have a franchise for being the singular expression of the aspirations of the American people if they fail to show the capacity to do so.

NEO: Presumably that's why 40% of the country are independents today. That's their way of making that statement.

DK: I think that's right.

NEO: One last question. How do you see the issue of political reform?

DK: Well, that's something that is going to take a while. But let's talk about the kind of reforms that are necessary. A constitutional amendment that makes it possible for only publicly financed elections. A constitutional amendment that would abolish the Electoral College and have instant runoff voting. These are the kinds of political reforms that would give the American people more control over their government. Will they happen? They might be a long time in coming. But let me tell you something. Ferment in this country keeps growing, keeps building. We see people feeling so left out of a political process, feeling that what's happening doesn't speak to them. So I want to change that. And I am working to change it. **NEO:**

PRIVATE PARTIES?

As a growing number of Americans jump the bipartisan ship, the Republicans and Democrats are battening down the hatches. Do parties have the right to exclude “outsiders” – the independent (“unaffiliated,” “undeclared” and “decline to state”) voters who are now a plurality of the electorate – from their primaries? Or do all voters, partisan or independent, have a more fundamental right to participate in every stage of the election process, including primaries? California independent Matt Meiners sketches the history of open primaries and attorney Harry Kresky takes a look at the legal and philosophical implications of “the parties v. the people” fight.

U.S. Supreme Court Weighs Rights of Parties vs. Public Interest

Harry Kresky

The U.S. Supreme Court recently heard two cases in which it was called upon to weigh the competing interests of political parties, government, and the American people. In the argument of both cases, surprising deference was paid to the rights of political parties by the Justices and lawyers alike. At a time when 42% of Americans (according to recent polls) are choosing not to affiliate with political parties, what do these decisions tell us about the legal framework in which the process of checks and balances is taking place?

In *Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party*, the Democratic and Republican parties joined with the Libertarian Party to challenge an election system adopted by a majority of the state's voters via referendum in 2004.¹ The referendum put in place a nonpartisan primary election in which candidates for the general election ballot are selected by all of the state's voters. (Candidates are allowed to indicate their party affiliation.)

When the political parties succeeded in overturning the referendum in the lower courts, the Grange and the state of Washington took the case to the Supreme Court. In the course of argument, Justice Kennedy posed the following question to the attorney general

Surely, our first president
would have answered
with a resounding “Yes”
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of the parties.

for the state of Washington, who was charged with defending the referendum: “Does the State have a legitimate interest in weakening the influence of political parties?” The attorney general answered, “No, Your Honor, it does not.” But that’s precisely what the referendum was designed to address – it was an attempt by the voters to check the undue power of political parties in the electoral process and in the state’s government.

In the second case, *Lopez-Torres v. N.Y. State Board of Elections*, the Democratic and Republican parties and the New York State Board of Elections sought reversal of a Court of Appeals decision that invalidated New York’s convention system for nominating judges. The system was judged by that court to be a shell game: voters were allowed to participate in the election of delegates, but it was impossible for them to do so in a meaningful way.

As in the Washington case, counsel for the reformers who challenged the convention system deferred to the rights of the political parties whose undue influence his clients were fighting to diminish. During the argument, he conceded that it would be acceptable for the state of New York to allow judicial candidates to be hand picked by party bosses.

A legal premise for this deference to the parties is that they are considered private associations protected by the First Amendment. A related premise is that the state (that is, government) is independent of the parties and a force against which the parties must be protected.

At one point in the Lopez-Torres argument, however, the following colloquy occurred:

Justice Scalia: Well, the parties are not protesting in this case, are they?

Mr. Rossman [attorney for the parties]: Absolutely not.

Justice Scalia: In fact, it is probably the case that the parties got this system adopted by the New York legislature.

The exchange reveals the extent to which the parties have succeeded in having it both ways – at one and the same time demanding and achieving legal status as private associations needing protection from the government, and controlling the very government from which they seek protection.

In achieving this special status – both protected from the government and in control of it – the parties have placed the American people in a bind. A basic principle of democratic government is that the people are sovereign. However, the American people appear to be not free to determine *how* they are governed. The people of the state of Washington passed a referendum establishing how they wanted their elections to be organized. The parties went to court and effectively said: *You cannot have what you want as it violates our right of association.* In New York, citizens sought to challenge a system for electing judges that gave de facto control to party bosses through a convention system they have rigged. The political parties that created the system through their dominant position in the state legislature invoked their status as private associations to defend it against legal challenge.

It is time for us to take a look at how the First Amendment has been applied to political parties. Unquestionably, it protects the right of citizens to freely associate in political parties, if they choose, and the right of those parties to express their point of view on public issues. It does not follow, however, that the parties are exempt from government regulation when their activities have become so intertwined with and determining of the electoral and governmental processes. George Washington clearly foresaw this danger; in his Farewell Address he cautioned against “the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally... [that] exists under different shapes in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled, or repressed; but in those of the popular form it is seen in its greatest rankness and is truly their worst enemy.”

Surely, our first president would have answered with a resounding “Yes” when asked if the state and its citizens have a legitimate interest in weakening the power of the parties. ^{NEO}

Harry Kresky is an attorney in New York City and counsel to the Committee for a Unified Independent Party.

This op-ed first appeared in The News Tribune of Tacoma, Washington on November 25, 2007.

1. The Grange is a multi-state organization of farmers that was founded in the period following the Civil War.

Free Association and the Fight to Bring Back Voter Choice: Developments in Open Primaries

Matt Meiners

“Congress shall make no law...abridging...the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

— First Amendment to the Constitution

In 1998 the *Almanac of American Politics* described California as “the great laboratory of America, the place where things – good things and bad things – seem to happen first.” Maybe that description had something to do with the fact that in 1996 California voters brought forth – by a 19%-plus margin – a new system that broke down strict partisan control of elections.

That year voters in California adopted Proposition 198, an open primary measure meant to ensure that “all persons entitled to vote, including those not affiliated with any political party, [would] have the right to vote at any election for any candidate regardless of the candidate’s political affiliation.” With the passage of Prop 198 – by a margin of 1,067,578 votes – the people of California, notoriously unpredictable and often politically volatile, propelled a new controversy into the American mainstream: Should the rights of voters to participate fully and freely in democratic elections be contained or abridged by the practice of political parties?

In June of 2000 the United States Supreme Court, made up of seven Republican appointees and two Democratic appointees, answered that question by striking down Proposition 198 as unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated the right of political parties to associate freely. The establishment had spoken: The divine right of parties shall reign supreme. Then, in 2003, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals invalidated Washington State’s half century-old blanket primary system. Voters forced the issue by adopting an updated version in 2004, creating the controversy that is now pending before the U.S. Supreme Court. (In blanket primaries voters are allowed to vote for candidates other than those of their registered party.) And in 2007 a measure providing for a constitutionally acceptable blanket primary failed in the Oregon Senate, by a narrow margin, over a point of technicality. Clearly the whole idea of open primaries, which curtail the power of parties and which empower independent voters, was a threatening one.

The partisans are reacting both to the issue and to the fact that it is increasingly being brought to the fore by the emergence of independents as a viable political bloc. Interestingly, though, the roots of these controversies can be traced to a long-running debate that started in earnest over a century ago with the advent of the Progressive Movement.

Progressives, along with the movement bearing their name, emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to the corruption and waste rampant in the politics of the day. The movement championed women's rights, free and fair elections, universal equality, equal protection, and popular involvement in government. Progressives helped pass the first modern Initiative and Referendum statutes in the country. In California we can thank (or curse) the Progressive Movement for the 2003 recall of Governor Gray Davis and the election of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Another of their priorities was weakening the political parties, which they saw as the root of many of the problems they were facing (and which we continue to face), by enacting open and blanket primaries. As progressives saw it, the more control the people had, and the less control the party bosses and political machines had, the better.

In 1907, as a direct result of the Progressive Movement's efforts, the state of Washington enacted a direct primary system. The new law provided the parties' rank and file members a voice and a vote in the nomination of candidates for the general election, shifting control of the nominating process away from smoky back rooms and party bosses. The state was required to print separate ballots for each party and allow voters, upon a "declaration" of their partisan affiliation at their polling place on Election Day, to receive the ballot of their choice. Under the new law, the top vote getter from each party for each office advanced from the primary to the general election. At the time this was a radical idea. Suddenly the parties were forced to listen to the people, or at least to those who chose their ballots.

By 1934 it became clear to Washingtonians that the sweeping 1907 reforms were inadequate to curb the power of the parties, and that even more popular control was needed. In 1935, with the support of the Washington State Grange and the AFL-CIO, the state assembly passed a measure establishing a blanket primary. For almost 60 years, from 1936 to 2003, the blanket primary served as the established and accepted system for selecting candidates for general elections in Washington State. Despite several attempts over the years to derail it, this system continued until 1996, when the overturning of California's Proposition 198 in the courts opened the door for parties to challenge open and blanket primaries in a new way. And challenge them they did.

In the case that decided the fate of Prop 198, the Court found that the new system "force[d] petitioners [the Democratic Party] to adulterate their candidate-selection process – a political party's basic function – by opening it

up to persons wholly unaffiliated with the party, who may have different views from the party. Such forced association has the likely outcome – indeed, it is Proposition 198's intended outcome – of changing the parties' message. Because there is no heavier burden on a political party's associational freedom, Proposition 198 is unconstitutional."¹ With these words, the Supreme Court gave the parties everything they needed to begin an attempt to roll back open and blanket primaries through litigation, and to reassert what they have always seen as their rightful place at the epicenter of governance.

The Washington State Democratic Party, in its turn, used this very same reasoning to go after the 1935 blanket primary law. In 2003 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, following the precedent set by the Supremes in the case that decided the fate of Proposition 198, sided with the party and struck down Washington's blanket primary as unconstitutional. The Supreme Court denied the state's request for an appeal. But the Supremes, in striking down Proposition 198, gave some guidance to proponents of the blanket primary, saying that "a state may adopt a primary election system in which all voters may participate and the top vote recipients advance to the general election, so long as 'primary voters are not choosing a party's nominee' (*California Democratic Party v. Jones*)."² Responding to this setback in 2004, Washington State voters heeded the Supreme Court and passed Initiative 872, a revised blanket primary law that addressed the constitutional issues by creating a system where only the top two vote getters from the primary election advance to the general. The new law was immediately challenged by the Republican Party and struck down by the Ninth Circuit. This time the state was granted an appeal by the Supreme Court and the case (*Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party*) is pending. The Court will hand down its ruling in the spring of 2008.

But even as the parties rolled out their plan to roll back open primaries, voter initiatives and advocacy groups were surfacing to expand the practice. For its part, California did not take the Supreme Court's strike-down of Prop 198 lying down. In 2004 a coalition of advocacy groups banded together in an attempt to pass Proposition 62, a law that would have restored constitutionally sound blanket primaries. However, in part due to public distrust of Governor Schwarzenegger, who endorsed the measure, it failed to pass; the vote was 46.1% to 53.9%.

Most notable among current efforts to open up primary elections is the one underway in Oregon, a state with no prior history of open primaries for statewide elections.

Here, former Democratic Secretary of State Phil Keisling is spearheading an effort to put an open primary initiative before the voters in November of 2008. Keisling and his team have engineered a construct for open primaries that he believes will withstand a constitutional challenge. And he regards independent non-aligned voters, who are 22% of the Oregon electorate, as key to the success of the campaign. "Independents are a sleeping giant, ready to move," he recently told *Neo* editor Jacqueline Salit.

These efforts and conflicts are just a few of the more high-profile clashes over this issue. In fact, according to a paper written by students Nathaniel Persily and Melissa Cully Anderson of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, "[f]rom 2001-2004 legislators from thirty states introduced 87 bills that would have opened up their states' presidential primary to independent voters or to voters of the opposing party."³

These conflicts, centering on the diverging interests of parties and voters, are bringing all sorts of important issues to the fore. One such issue, little discussed in this debate, is the disenfranchisement of citizens living in districts that have been gerrymandered for the single purpose of making them noncompetitive – that is, districts where the election that counts is the primary. California, in particular, has this problem in spades. In an effort to maintain control of government at all costs, the Republicans and the Democrats in the state legislature worked together to redistrict the state into safe Republican and Democratic districts where incumbents were unlikely to be defeated. In closed systems, like California's, where only party members may vote for most offices in the primary election, it is not uncommon for a majority of voters in a given district to be legally barred from participation in the decisive round of the election. Of course the parties' response is that these "disenfranchised" voters may nominate someone from their own party, or create their own party, or join one of the major parties. This argument, while technically plausible, ignores the existence of independent voters – who are distinctly anti-party, and who are now close to 40% of the electorate nationwide. These voters are effectively excluded from the election process and stripped of their very right to vote.

When we step back and remove all the lenses through which we filter our view of politics, one thing seems to stay true: the function of the modern primary is that it winnows the field for the general election. So why muck up the purpose of primaries by using them for an exercise of partisan power? Surely the major parties would survive under an open primary system. Indeed, the very fact that these parties still exist in states that have open primaries belies the validity of their argument.

No, the real objection on the part of the parties is that these systems allow smaller forces to participate, to form fluid coalitions and to be heard through the din of modern electoral politics. This beneficial development has the effect of allowing voters more than a choice between Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. What could be simpler, more fair (and more threatening to the two-party system!) than allowing all voters to choose from all the available candidates for a given office, and then holding a general election between the two who got the most votes?

The truth is that open and blanket primaries are simple and fair. Partisan opposition to these reforms lays bare the one overarching goal of the two-party system: to maintain supreme control. The argument the parties are using to maintain this control, the argument that open primaries violate their right to free association, lays bare yet another question, perhaps for another essay:

Since when did the associational rights of parties trump the associational rights of citizens and voters? Now there's an interesting question indeed. NEO

Matthew Meiners studied history at Northwestern University and the University of Edinburgh. He is now a philanthropist and essayist and is actively involved in the development of the independent political movement. He currently resides in San Francisco.

1. Syllabus *California Democratic Party, et al. v. Jones, Secretary of State of California, et al.*
2. Brief for the Petitioners, *Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party*.
3. Nathaniel Persily and Melissa Cully Anderson, "Regulating Democracy Through Democracy: The Use of Direct Legislation in Election Law Reform" (February 1, 2005). University of Pennsylvania Law School. Scholarship at Penn Law. Paper 60. <http://lsr.nellco.org/upenn/wps/papers/60>

These Days, Independents Are All Over the Map

From Helena to Harlem, independent voters all over the country are reaching out to other independents, creating new kinds of organizations, making their voices heard and their presence felt. And they're getting noticed. Here we showcase a small sample of what the local and national media are saying about the independent wild card in contemporary American politics.

The New York Amsterdam News

Demetria Irwin

Group calls for Clinton/ Obama debate in Harlem

November 1-7, 2007 — Dr. Lenora Fulani, co-founder of the Committee for a Unified Independent Party (CUIP) and a 1992 presidential candidate, is spearheading an effort to have a debate between Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama at Harlem's historic Apollo Theater. An exact membership count was not available, but according to Fulani, the Committee for a Harlem Debate between Clinton and Obama has received thousands of requests from Harlemites wanting to further the cause. Current members include Keith McHenry, former president of the Harlem Business Alliance, and Geoffrey Davis, brother of slain councilman James Davis.

The committee held a press conference in September in front of the Apollo Theater and surveyed 759 attendees at the African-American Day Parade. According to CUIP's website, over 95 percent of the respondents said they would like to see a debate between Clinton and Obama.

Fulani responded to a question about why only these two candidates were chosen as opposed to any of the other candidates in the crowded field of Democratic presidential hopefuls.

"Obama is obviously of interest to the Black community as a Black candidate. Clinton is of interest because she claims she already has the Black vote. There

has not been enough interaction between these two candidates in the debates so far, and the Clinton and Obama campaigns have particular relevance for the community," said Fulani.

Though not shy about detailing the Independence Party's influence on politics, particularly the election of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Fulani is quick to note that she has not endorsed anyone for the '08 presidential race and so far, has not been impressed by any of the candidates.

Fulani said that formal invitations to the senators have been sent and a request was also sent to the Apollo Theater to utilize the space for the proposed event. As the group awaits responses, it has continued its outreach ef-



PHOTO: CATHY STEWART

Fulani's Committee at the Apollo. The tee-shirts say "Who decided Hillary is best for the Black community?"

forts in churches and block associations all over Harlem.

Earlier this year, Clinton and Obama vowed to only attend debates that are sanctioned by the Democratic National Committee (DNC), even though they have the freedom to attend debates not affiliated with the Party. The proposed Apollo debate is not DNC sanctioned and it is not clear whether the senators will make an exception to their self-imposed rule.

For information on how to join the committee, visit www.independentvoting.org.

Demetria Irwin is a reporter for The New York Amsterdam News.

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U.S. News & World Report

Liz Halloran

Suddenly, it seems like Deja Vu all over again to liberals: Will Bloomberg do a Nader to Democratic hopes for 2008?

July 2, 2007 — For two days last week, 3,000 liberal activists who converged on the Washington Hilton had partied like it was 2008 — a confident and sometimes swaggering celebration of their gathering influence and conviction that by November next year a Democrat would be packing for the White House.

They trumpeted their role in helping Democrats take control of Congress last year. They met in dozens of progressive training sessions and were wooed by six of the eight Democratic presidential candidates. And in the middle of the annual Take Back America conference — its first incarnation five years ago drew a determined contingent of about 150 activists — they filled the hotel ballroom with tumultuous applause while the event's undisputed star, presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama, dazzled with his "time to turn the page" speech. "Electrifying," said Massachusetts state Rep. Jim Marzilli.

But less than 24 hours later, a chill settled over the last day of the conference. Morning newspapers carried late news out of California: During a West Coast trip, two-

Idaho Independents



In September Mitch Campbell, a founder of the American Independent Movement of Idaho, set up a booth at the Twin Falls County Fair and took the opportunity to ask Idaho voters to sign a petition for open primaries. He got 200 signatures — and a story in the Times-News of Twin Falls.

term New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has been exploring an independent or third-party presidential run, announced he'd quit the Republican Party. A longtime Democrat, Bloomberg in 2001 had switched parties to run for mayor on the GOP and independent party lines, avoiding a packed Democratic primary field.

So as the conference drew to a close, instead of looking to next year and the pursuit of their top issues — ending the Iraq war and reforming the healthcare system — many of them were looking back to 2000. That's when, with the aid of the Supreme Court, third-party candidate Ralph Nader helped give the presidency to George W. Bush instead of Democrat Al Gore. Was this déjà vu all over again? Would billionaire Bloomberg run, and whom would he hurt?

"Our" agenda. In the halls of the Hilton, that was a no-brainer. "He could sell out the Democratic Party like Nader," said Gene Estess of Brooklyn. "An independent is not going to win this election; it would be handing it to the Republicans." Robert Borosage, codirector of Campaign for America's Future and a founder of the conference, said the mayor — who favors abortion rights and gay rights, supports gun control, and has an aggressive environmental agenda — "draws from us; if he runs, he runs on our progressive agenda."

When he ran for his second mayoral term, Bloomberg pulled 47 percent of the black vote, an "extraordinary

realignment that shattered the Democratic Party,” said Jackie Salit, who coordinated both of his campaigns on the independent line. “I think there are parallels.”

Bloomberg continues to insist he is not planning to run and intends to serve out his term as mayor. But he has been investigating rules to get on state ballots, made a recent trip to New Hampshire, where the first primary will be held in January, and has been making speeches across the country. Speculation is that he will make an announcement after the February 5 Super Tuesday, when more than 20 states will hold primaries or caucuses. “He’s not going to go in it to hurt someone,” said Maurice Carroll, a longtime New York City reporter who’s now director for the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. “He’ll go in to win.” And with a multibillion-dollar fortune at his disposal, Bloomberg is almost guaranteed to get on the ballots and can pay workers down to the grass-roots level.

Marzilli, whose district includes Bloomberg’s hometown, said, in the end, he believes the mayor won’t run: “It’s a shame to think of such an innovator as a spoiler, but in a two-party system, that’s what he becomes.” Borosage was more sanguine. “I think there is so much enthusiasm among independents and Democrats in general about unifying, that it would be very hard to overcome,” he said. But, he predicted, a lot of people are going to make a lot of money consulting for the New York mayor. True, no doubt, whatever Bloomberg decides.

Liz Halloran is a senior writer for U.S. News & World Report.

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STLtoday.com

Jo Mannies

Duo announce group for independent voters: Show Me Independents

October 3, 2007 — Two frustrated voters formerly aligned with opposing parties and from opposite sides of the state announced this morning that they are launching a new movement for independent Missouri voters.

“We’re frustrated. Our state government doesn’t listen to us. Our federal government doesn’t listen to us,” said one of them, Barbara Woodruff of O’Fallon.

“No one seems to be able to stand up to this president and say, ‘We’re getting out of Iraq,’” said Woodruff, who calls herself a former Democrat. “We’ve spent close to \$1 trillion on this war, yet we’re fighting over health care for children.”

In a statement, Woodruff and Mat Clark of Neosho add, “In Missouri the frustration is just as great with scandal, partisanship and increased lobbyist influence on legislatures and legislation which affects us all. Among those frustrated with both levels of government as well as the two major political parties are a group of Missourians who have decided to organize into an independent organization and are calling themselves the Show Me Independents.

“Show Me Independents will join the battle for a more fair and equitable state tax structure, unencumbered election process, decreasing lobbyist influence on state office holders as well as House and Senate membership and increasing ethics, honesty and accountability for all elected officials.

“The purpose of Show Me Independents is to organize independent voters so that they can exercise their power as a force for democratic political reform on the national, state and local level.”

However, Woodruff said the group won’t get involved in endorsing candidates. Rather, it will focus on “educating citizens that they do have a voice.”

So far, the group only has a dozen or so members, but hopes to grow, she added.

As she and Clark say in their statement: “We believe that the United States has been profoundly hurt by ideological and political labeling. The issues that we as a nation face today are not based in left or right, but in what will best serve the citizens of our country and our state. We believe that this is the greatest country ever created, and we will have our voice heard in our state legislature and in the federal government.”

For the moment, the organizers are telling interested people to email them at Showmeindependents@gmail.com, or visit the website of the Committee for a Unified Independent Party.

Jo Mannies is a political correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

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As the first primaries approach, the presidential candidates are all talking up a storm. The professional opinion-givers are all watching the weather and making their forecasts.

And *Neo* editor Jacqueline Salit is watching the Sunday morning television talk shows – most often NBC’s *The Chris Matthews Show*, *Meet the Press*, and *The McLaughlin*

Group – and talking them over with Fred Newman, the postmodern philosopher, to get his take on the talk.

Salit and Newman have been talking talk shows since the mid-’90s. For the last several years those conversations have been transcribed and published as *Talk/Talk*.^{*} In this issue we reprint the *Talk/Talk* of September 23, in which the conversation centers on Tim Russert’s *Meet the Press* interview with Alan Greenspan. The former chair of the Federal Reserve, who served from 1987 until 2006, was appointed by Ronald Reagan.

^{*}The most recent *Talk/Talk* is available every week on the website of the Committee for a Unified Independent Party, www.independentvoting.org. An archive of previous transcripts is also located on the site.

Talk / Talk



Greenspan Changes His Mind

September 23, 2007

SALIT: We just watched Alan Greenspan on *Meet the Press*. Here are three political positions that he articulated in the discussion with Tim Russert: Bill Clinton governed as a Republican; the Iraq war is about oil; and neither political party is addressing the economic and social challenges we face. Should we be surprised to hear Alan Greenspan, who people think of as a mainstream conservative, a Republican economist, putting forth these remarks?

NEWMAN: No, I don't think we should be surprised by it. And I think he's correct on all three.

SALIT: Okay. So, let's make him chairman of the Fed again! Seriously though, let's talk about each of these propositions. Bill Clinton governed as a Republican. Greenspan says Clinton supported free trade, globalization, welfare reform and fiscal restraint – all policies that Greenspan, as a conservative Republican, endorsed. He was chairman of the Fed under Clinton, though he seemed surprised that Clinton supported all those policies. He thought Clinton's policies were beneficial to the country overall. Now, however, he says the Democratic Party has moved to the left and a new Clinton administration is going to approach things with a different philosophy.

NEWMAN: The problem with Bill Clinton's policies was not so much what he did, it's what he didn't do. The initiatives you described were okay things to do. But he *failed* to support traditional progressive Democratic Party issues with the same hard-line vigor. And the failure to address issues of poverty while you're implementing welfare reform, the failure to support the

trade unions while you're backing free trade and globalization, the failure to deliver universal health care while you're balancing the budget – that's what has left the people of this country vulnerable and under-protected. In some sense this is what helped to create the context for George Bush getting elected and then pursuing extremist right-wing policies. That's what's to be criticized about Bill Clinton. But the particular things he did were, in many cases, pragmatically required. It's interesting to hear Greenspan call him a Republican because I've said for many years that Clinton was the primary architect of the current George Bush, so I couldn't agree more.

SALIT: Greenspan says, "I know this is politically incorrect to say, but the Iraq war is mainly about oil." And then he goes on to elaborate about the extent to which Saddam Hussein was looking to be in control of the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 18 million barrels of oil move every day, and says that ultimately, if you take away the hyperbole and the ideology, that's what the war is really about.

NEWMAN: You don't have to be a genius to figure that out. Yes, that's of course what the war's about. It's also what our policies in that area of the world are about. And it's why we're going to be there for a very long time. All this stuff about creating a workable democracy in Iraq is nonsense. Washington's interest in workable democracies is entirely secondary to its concern to protect resources important to the U.S. economy. And one could even argue that it should be that way. Part of the responsibility of the president is to make sure the United States of America does well.

But what is it about changing your mind that is an expression of weakness? Because that's presumably why there's a dogfight or such a thing about this. So you changed your mind!

On September 10 **MoveOn.org** ran a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* attacking General David Petraeus, the commander of the multinational force in Iraq, for telling Congress that the situation there was improving. The headline of the ad – “General Petraeus or General Betray Us?” – touched off a storm of protest by Republicans.

Michael Vick, the quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, was convicted last summer on federal felony charges in connection with his involvement in an interstate dogfighting ring.

And part of what the United States of America is dependent upon to do well is oil. Now, there are less imperialistic ways of handling that. The Iraq war is not an example of that. The war has been conducted in a way that is aggressively imperialistic and it was conceptualized by aggressively imperialist thinkers. What can you say except, of course, as Greenspan says, if there wasn't oil underneath the sand, it would be a whole different situation.

SALIT: Then Greenspan says that neither political party – neither the Democrats nor the Republicans – are addressing the economic and social changes that we face in this country. Greenspan denied there was any kind of serious crisis in Social Security, but asserted that the genuine crisis is in Medicare. The size of the retirement-age population is going to double over the next 25 years and Medicare can't handle that. He added the moral issue of a kind of false advertising. He says that if people knew that Medicare wasn't going to be there, they would make different decisions and choices in their lives than those they make on the assumption that the program is going to be there. Greenspan points to a disconnect between the major parties and their capacity to find solutions to the real issues that the country faces. Obviously, this is something that we agree with.

NEWMAN: Well, here I think Greenspan is hiding out. The real underlying issue is that American capitalism has benefited enormously in the last 20, 30, 40 years, exceeding its wildest expectations, on the basis of very contained commitments to the well-being of the population. For example, America doesn't have universal health care. That overall framework, which Greenspan has supported, has been so excessively pro-capitalist that we now have a great economic boom, but the people of our country do not have the basic bottom line protections that other Western industrialized countries provide. So now you have a situation in which U.S. big business is faced with a serious quandary, namely, if it wants to continue to prosper at the rate that it has by disregarding these issues, it faces the prospect of a social crisis. This is something that the two major parties are not taking seriously. The basic policy shift is that you're going to have to say to the capitalist community as a whole: *You're going to have to reduce the rate of profit that has benefited you so extraordinarily in order to fund an investment in social needs.* When he says that the parties haven't taken that into consideration, I would agree. But I don't know that Alan Greenspan has shed very much light

on the structural nature of a crisis that is so serious for the American people.

SALIT: Hillary Clinton was also a guest on *Meet the Press*.

NEWMAN: Indeed, she was.

SALIT: She was asked about her vote on the war. Nothing new there. She was asked about the MoveOn.org ad and the controversy over that. “We should all stop that,” she said. “No one should be doing that.” She talked about her experience with attempting to introduce universal health care and how she’s modified and developed her plan. This was an interview with the frontrunner, both for the Democratic nomination and I guess for the presidency. Was there anything new or interesting there?

NEWMAN: No.

SALIT: Then we’ll move on.

NEWMAN: So to speak.

SALIT: This is perhaps a little thing, but I was struck by something on *Meet the Press*. Tim Russert did his classic thing with Hillary: “On such and such a date, you said X. Now, today, you’re saying Y. There’s a difference between those two. Doesn’t that mean that you’ve changed your mind?” The paradigmatic Russert question. So Hillary responds, “Well, I think the circumstances on the ground have changed, and I have to continue to appraise what’s in the interest of the American people.” But what you see in that exchange is that as a politician, as a government leader, Hillary’s not allowed to say, “I changed my mind.” Twenty minutes later, Russert is interviewing Alan Greenspan. He says, “On such and such a date, you said A, and then on a subsequent date you said B. What happened?” And Greenspan says, “Oh, I changed my mind.” And then he explains how he changed his mind. Now, this is someone who is talked about in the most hallowed and hushed tones as being one of the smartest people in America, indeed in the world. It’s perfectly okay for him to say, “I changed my mind.” But if you’re running for the president of the United States you’re not allowed to change your mind. I was struck by the double standard.

NEWMAN: In a way, it’s not a double standard. One person’s looking for votes in a vicious two-party system and the other person is not. Arguably, it’s not a double standard; it’s a different thing. American two-

party politics brings out the worst in us. I was struck by something Andrew Sullivan said on *Chris Matthews*. I’m not sure I completely agree with it, but it was an insight – that a Giuliani/Clinton campaign would, of necessity, bring out the absolute worst in the American psyche. And right now that’s the general election match-up likely to take place. He would prefer a more civil campaign – between McCain and Obama, where he thought that the debate would be more beneficial to the country. But generally, two-party politics is a winner-take-all dogfight. Dogfighting has been in the news lately with Michael Vick and all. It’s a cruel and brutal thing. But it occurred to me at one point during the Vick scandal that the dogs would probably not have thought of doing this if they hadn’t seen the American political system first. I’m just joking here, of course. But as for there being a double standard, I think it’s more that there’s a diversity of standards for different situations.

SALIT: But what is it about changing your mind that is an expression of weakness? Because that’s presumably why there’s a dogfight or such a thing about this. So you changed your mind! Does that mean there’s something weak in you that you didn’t get the right answer the first minute and stick to it all the way through?

NEWMAN: It’s part of our entire culture. I hope people don’t consider this blasphemous, but Jesus is not allowed to stand up and say, *Oh, by the way, I’m not the Son of God*. There’s a whole construct based on these things being foundational and people use and misuse that and say *What? You were wrong? Well, if you were wrong then maybe everything you’re saying now is wrong and you’re going to change your mind tomorrow...* It’s part of the construct of Western culture. In some situations it’s permissible to say you changed your mind. But to change your mind and not maintain your position within the rigid construct that has emerged over thousands of years in Western culture can be, in certain situations, absolutely self-destructive. And so Hillary doesn’t do it. As you say, she can’t simply say, “I changed my mind...I looked it over...” Other people think you can do that and that appeals to them. But it is going up against something big – culturally big – in Western constructs. It happens, but it doesn’t easily happen.

SALIT: Thanks, Fred.

NEWMAN: You’re welcome. NEO

Ron Paul Movement Grows Against the Odds

Gary Schor

“One person, one vote” is an American tradition. Straw polls are often our first means of measuring support for a candidate, and are extremely influential in shaping the presidential race. Mitt Romney was granted instant front-runner status due to his victory in the Iowa straw poll last summer. But the accuracy of straw polls is called into question when campaigns bus in supporters, and offer meals and other perks in exchange for the voters’ “participation.” Such tactics, although they appear unfair, have become an accepted if unfortunate part of the presidential election process.

Fast-forward to Florida and the November 28 straw poll that coincided with the St. Petersburg CNN/YouTube Republican debate. The event overwhelmingly seemed to support anti-war Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul. The crowds, signs, tee-shirts, and buttons, not to mention the two planes in the sky and the two yachts in the bay, all pointed to the likelihood that Ron Paul would win the day. Paul’s positions – his outspoken opposition to the war in Iraq (and his willingness to go up against war hawks Giuliani and McCain in the debates), his opposition to the Trans-Texas (aka NAFTA) Corridor, and his on-the-record support, as expressed to *RocktheDebates.org*, for the inclusion of qualified independents in the general election debates – are giving a lot of independent voters (and not just anti-establishment Republicans) reason to stand up and cheer.

But what appeared to be the likely outcome in St. Petersburg – a victory for Ron Paul – didn’t happen.

The poll workers at this event, under the instructions of local Republican Party officials, allowed attendees to vote multiple times. “Each time they come through the line, they can vote no more than ten times. Then they must return to the end of the line to vote again,” said one election worker. The Romney campaign was eager to give the few supporters of their candidate who turned out to the event enough tickets to ensure a Romney vic-

tory. Pinellas County Republican Executive Committee Chairman Tony DiMatteo even boasted: “This is the best election money can buy, anywhere.”

Independent activists and fair-minded Americans of all political stripes often talk of ways to get the Big Money influence out of politics. In Florida and throughout the country, Ron Paul’s supporters are doing just that. Trevor Lyman, a grassroots Ron Paul supporter from Miami, conceived the idea of a “one day” online donation drive. Coinciding with “Guy Fawkes Day” (he was the renegade who plotted to blow up Parliament in 1605), the November 5 “money bomb” took in \$4.2 million from over 37,000 contributors, with an average donation of \$103. The grassroots Paul organization has paid for billboards, air time, and produced its own commercials. Supporters are even launching their own “Ron Paul Blimp,” soon to be hovering at a bowl game near you.

The “unofficial” Ron Paul campaign has made heavy use of the Internet. Online forums and videos organize and inspire, while the site *meetup.com* acts as a means for bringing his supporters together in the real world. Ron Paul is the first to admit that the grassroots effort is responsible for much of his success: “It’s not a top-down organization, it’s sort of bottom-up. All we have done at the campaign is to provide the message, and the message turns out to be popular.”

Holding a piece of straw to the wind to see which way it blows is behind the “straw poll” metaphor. The Big Money politics of the status quo has hindered the ability to measure the pulse of the voters accurately. But straw is grown from grass, and against the odds, grassroots political activism seems alive and well in modern America. NEO

Gary Schor lives in Silver Springs, FL. He is a member of Sunshine Independents, and a grassroots organizer for Ron Paul.

