



January 28, 2016

Open and Honest Elections Coalition launches political reform initiatives

The **Open & Honest Elections** coalition, spearheaded by former Phoenix mayor turned-independent Paul Johnson, held a press conference on January 21st to launch two initiatives aimed for Arizona's November 2016 ballot. The event put on public display the unusual and diverse coalition that is leading a two-pronged effort towards political reform.

One initiative creates a nonpartisan open primary. The other creates a disclosure requirement allowing voters to know who contributes \$10,000 or more to any given candidate.

The state's press corps attended, resulting in a blanket of coverage for the coalition and the initiatives in print, TV and radio.

[Arizona Republic](#) (front page article), [La Voz](#) (Spanish), [Tucson Daily Star](#), [Your West Valley](#), [KJZZ](#), [Chuck Coughlin interview on The Show](#), [KFYI](#), [Arizona Capitol Times](#), [Associated Press](#), [Arizona News Radio](#), [Arizona's Politics](#), [KVOA](#), [Payson Roundup](#), [KTAR](#), [AZ Family](#) and more.

Speakers included:

- Attorney and longtime community activist Danny Ortega
- Former Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard

- President & CEO of HighGround, a leading Republican consulting firm, Charles Coughlin
- Independent Voters for Arizona founding member Jim Morrison
- President of IndependentVoting.org Jackie Salit
- President of Open Primaries John Opdycke
- Former Mayor of Phoenix, Paul Johnson.

Chuck Coughlin opened the press conference by declaring *"At 2:00 today-mark your calendars-the revolution has just began!"*

Danny Ortega spoke of the *"huge, diverse coalition of leaders and concerned citizens" representing Arizonans "of every age, race, background and party affiliation who are standing together today because our current electoral system is broken."*

Jim Morrison addressed the 1.2 million independent voters in the state who choose not to participate. He stated, *"We intend to galvanize independents, with intelligence and inspiration, as part of this national movement."*

John Opdycke announced a gift by Open Primaries of \$1 million and pledged to help raise a total of \$13 million from local and national supporters. *"We plan on mobilizing every voter in Arizona to stand up against Dark Money and an unfair and exclusionary primary system and we will have the resources to do that."*



Jackie Salit, along with Paul Johnson, Terry Goddard and Danny Ortega



Independent Voters for Arizona activist Deb Gain Braley gathers signatures at press conference

Jackie Salit spoke of the growth of independent voters across the country as well as in Arizona, including 200,000 who have registered as independents in Arizona since the last open primaries initiative was on the ballot in 2012. *"The numbers, however, are not the whole story,"* she said. While Arizona is often described as a state with "crazy politics" she stated that Arizona, through this effort, would *"lead the way toward a great awakening of the American people in the direction of democracy."*

Salit was quoted in a front page article in the *Arizona Republic* about the campaign. *"A political system has to accurately represent the true picture of the electorate,"* she said. *"And that's not happening now."* [Read the Arizona Republic article here](#)

[Watch Paul Johnson's TV interview on local News 12 on the eve of the coalition's announcement](#)

Independents lead campaign to open presidential primaries

Meanwhile, on the ground, [Independent Voters for Arizona](#) have been calling on the Democratic and Republican Parties to open the presidential primaries to independents. To date, over 10,000 Arizonans have written letters and sent emails to the state chairs of both parties. The campaign has been in dialogue with Secretary of State, Michele Reagan, County Commissioners and others asking for their support. Secretary of State Reagan has proposed that the state stop paying for the closed

presidential primaries. [Read about it here in the Arizona Republic.](#)

The **letters to the editor** campaign has inspired conversations both within the pages of local community newspapers and outside of them. According to Elaine Haley, her letter was published at 6:30am and by 7am, the calls began to come in. By the end of the day, she and her husband had fielded over 20 calls from organizations and voters, some who wanted fight with them, some who wanted to express their support.



Click the picture to read letters to the editor

In the *Arizona Daily Sun* independents Tully Mann and Josie Martinez write: " As leaders of the two major parties in Arizona, the Democratic and Republican Party Chairs (Alexis Tameron and Robert Graham) have immense influence on the course of political dialogue here. That matters a great deal to all Arizonans, irrespective of party affiliation. They have the choice of opening up political dialogue in Arizona - or shutting it down. Why would they choose to shut it down? "



Armani Stewart, an independent, at MLK Day celebrations in Phoenix where Independent Voters for Arizona organizers were out with a letter to the DP and RP chairs to allow indies to vote in the presidential primary

Conversations are swirling in the comments sections of the papers themselves. When Jim Cawley and Bill Carlton had their group letter published imploring the parties to open up the process for all voters, a reader (Joe) wrote in saying " *It's my party and you can cry if you want to..... a political party can be compared to any exclusive situation, whether it be your employer or family.*" Paul Bocconcetti read Joe's response and decided to pen a letter himself, where he pointed out " *Independent voters, who constitute the largest voting group in Arizona, want and should have the same options: to vote for the candidate(s) of their choice, regardless of party affiliation, in a primary election. Unless the four recognized political parties are prepared to fully fund the costs of primary elections, without taxpayer assistance, there is no justification to limit any*

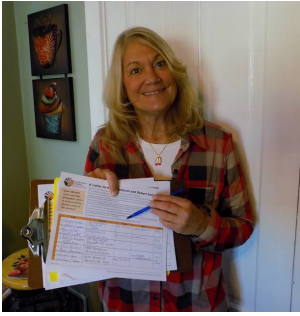
qualified voter from voting for the candidate(s) of their choice, regardless of party affiliation, in a primary election. "

In commenting on the back and forth, Cathy Stewart, IndependentVoting.org's Director of National Development, had this to say: " *This is terrific to see. Grassroots organizing at its best, stimulating a dialogue!*"

[Click here to read a sampling of letters that have been published.](#)

Report from Kim Ames-Wright, organizer of Independent Voters for Arizona Prescott Meeting

"Seventeen Prescott voters met for coffee and lively discussion on Saturday morning, January 9th. It was standing room only in the small room. Those attending expressed frustration with the two-party system and the inability of politicians to work together on important issues like healthcare, the environment, immigration and education. Most wanted to see change, but didn't feel their voice would make any difference. They were glad to sign the petition calling on the parties to open the presidential primaries and several took additional sheets to pass around to friends. They all asked "What can we do?" "How can we get legislators to listen?" Most highly supported the idea of parties paying for their own primary elections if independents were not



included. They wanted to participate and made plans for the next meeting.

As an organizer, it was exciting to see the enthusiasm of others, many who are involved in local groups or activities. They

were informed about current issues and eager to discuss change. Attendees were excited to learn that they were part of a national movement. It is so rewarding to educate others and be a part of this reform effort!"



Kim is already planning the next meeting for February 20, 9:00 am at the Cupper's Bistro in Prescott.

Read Kim's letter in the Arizona Daily Courier calling on the Parties to open the presidential primaries.

Meeting with Congressman to Urge him to Co-Sponsor the Open Our Democracy Act

Independent Voters of Nevada founder Catana Barnes met with Congressman Mark Amodei, representative of Nevada's second district this week and asked for his support on Rep. John Delaney's Open Our Democracy bill, which calls for top two nonpartisan primaries, redistricting reform and making Election Day a national holiday.



Barnes came prepared with a copy of the bill, several articles, and her own **Letter to the Editor** about the bill which was published in six Nevada community papers. Catana shared with the Congressman that she was part of a grassroots effort around the country, in which her letter was only one of many that had been written. The Congressman responded that he was favorable to the issues in the bill and that he would let Barnes know within the week whether he would become a sponsor. Stay tuned!

Virginia Independents Push for Political Reform



Led by Steve Richardson (left), founder of **Virginia Independents Voters Association**, independents have initiated a letter to the editor-writing campaign in support of House Delegate Sam Rasoul's (right) political reform package which would create top two nonpartisan primaries, redistricting reform and term limits. Rasoul's bill for political reform comes at a moment when the Republican Party of Virginia has moved to curtail independents' voting rights even further and after not one of the 122 incumbent VA state legislators lost reelection in 2015.



Richardson immediately put out a call to independents to speak out in support of Rasoul's bill.

VIVA members are also contacting members of the Privileges and Elections Committee to urge them to hold a hearing on the bill. To support VIVA's efforts, contact Steve Richardson at stevenrichardson@verizon.net.

A Profile in Independence:

Todd Thornton, Kentucky

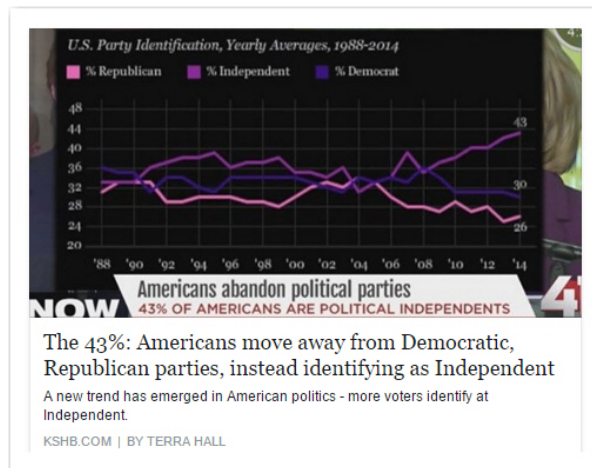
Todd Thornton is a lifelong independent and the founder and owner of Great Way to Learn, the largest real estate school in Kentucky. He is also an education activist and is currently touring Kentucky, offering every school district a free film screening of the Sundance-nominated education documentary "Most Likely to Succeed." During this legislative session, he's launching an effort to eliminate straight ticket voting in the Commonwealth. While they might not seem connected, his involvement in politics and fair elections is the direct result of his educational efforts.

Said, Todd , *"Everyone agrees our Democracy is broken, but the question is how to fix it. In Kentucky I believe the first step is to eliminate straight ticket voting.... The only way to fundamentally change our educational system is to ensure our elected officials not only better understand what works in the classroom, but fully grasp the financial incentives, strategies, and support school districts and teachers need so their students can succeed.... We have to return to a fair voting system where each person gets one vote to cast for each race and every candidate regardless of party affiliation begins their campaign on an equal footing."*



In the News

- KSHB's Terra Hall interviewed Jackie Salit for this TV piece that aired in a number of markets, including Kansas City, Tampa, Cincinnati, and San Diego. Click below to watch.



- The **Florida Times Union** editorial board (Jacksonville.com) did a story in support of a constitutional amendment for top two.
- "Measure to Establish Nonpartisan Elections in South Dakota Qualifies for 2016 Ballot." **Read about it in IVN News.**
- The **Associated Press** reports on the open primaries bill introduced in New Mexico by Reps. Antonio Maestas and Stephanie Garcia. Bob Perls and leaders of **New Mexico Open Primaries** helped draft the bill and pushed for its introduction.

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