



April 21, 2016

NY Independents Protest Closed Primaries

On the eve of the New York primary where 3.2 million voters were excluded because they are independents, advocates of open primaries joined independents in shining a spotlight on the glaring shortcomings in New York's election system.

150 protesters gathered on the steps of City Hall on Thursday, April 14 to protest the closed primary system. They held signs and chanted "Let us Vote!" and "Open Up the New York Primary!"

In an interview with *The Atlantic* magazine, "**The Effects of New York's Restrictive Voting Laws,**" Jackie Salit told reporter Russell Berman, "*The political parties in New York have the state on lockdown, and they're very committed to protecting that.*"



Speakers at April 14th Press Conference on the steps of City Hall: (L to R) NYU Student Leader, Ali Akbar M. Hassonjee; NYC Independence Clubs, Juliana Francisco; Open Primaries President, John Opdycke; Assemblyman Fred Thiele; IndependentVoting.org President, Jackie Salit; New York City Independence Clubs, Alvaader Frazier.

"In New York State today, there are over 3 million voters who are independent of the Democratic or Republican parties. Let me tell you a little bit about who independents are," said Alvaader Frazier of NYC Independent Clubs. "37% of voters under 30 are independents. 15% of African-



American voters are independents and 22% of African-Americans under 30 are independents. And 22% of Latino voters are independents with 32% of Latino voters under 30 registering as independents. 35% of Asian voters are independents; with 40% of Asian voters under 30 becoming independents. This growing community of voters are barred from our primaries at all levels, including next Tuesday's Presidential Primary."

Assemblyman Fred Thiele, an independent and the author of a bill to open the

presidential primary to independents and a bill for Top Two nonpartisan elections in New York State, was also one of the speakers. "The laws are skewed against the independents, whether it's voting or the entire electoral process," he said. "You have to work extra hard if you're an independent, and that is one of the reasons, I think, that you're seeing such depressed turnout in elections. Independents are not coming out to vote because they think they don't have a stake in the process."

John Opdycke, President of Open Primaries stated: "New York is a powerhouse state. But the political rules keep the voters powerless. Independent voters are shut out and everyone else was forced to pick which primary they wanted to vote in six months ago! There is a national movement growing to reform the primary system so that it works for the voters, not the parties and nowhere is open primaries more necessary than in New York."

If you would like to continue the fight to make this the last CLOSED presidential primary in New York State, sign up for the "Committee to Bring Open Primaries to New York" [here](#).

The press conference received strong press coverage with over 20 print, radio and television pieces. You can watch the [full video of the press conference here](#).

Take a look at additional press coverage below:

"Meet The People Barred From Voting In New York's Presidential Primary"
(Think Progress)

"New York primaries: Advocates push to open vote to all" (AM New York)

"Independent voters, advocates call for an end to New York's closed primaries" (Metro NY)

"Independents may feel the Bern, but they can't vote in New York's closed primary." (Associated Press)

Campaign for Non-Partisan Elections in South Dakota Takes Off

Amendment V (an amendment for nonpartisan elections in South Dakota) is on the ballot and independents are part of a diverse coalition that is working to pass it in November. South Dakota Voice of Independents is building a local affiliate in the state and campaigning for the amendment.

South Dakotans for Non-Partisan Elections is a diverse coalition of Republican, Democrat, and independent leaders committed to nonpartisan elections to put the South Dakota voters, not the parties, in charge. Over 100,000 voters (more than 21%) in South Dakota are registered as independents and they are locked out of the primary elections. Amendment V would create a nonpartisan election system that gives all voters equal access to primary ballots and treats all candidates the same (all candidates would appear on one ballot).



Rick Knobe

Said Rick Knobe, former Sioux Falls Mayor, an independent and a leader of the coalition: *"People who make their living and have political clout based on the status quo, they don't want to change it."*

Meanwhile, volunteers at IndependentVoting.org's national office are polling South Dakotans on their views on Amendment V and on the plight of independents in South Dakota. Overwhelmingly, South Dakotans say they would like to have a nonpartisan system, similar to Nebraska, with 85% saying they are looking forward to voting for Amendment V in the Fall.

Check out the [campaign's new website](#) and this [piece from the March 28th edition of The Wall Street Journal](#).

Maine Legislators Attempt to Fast-track Bill for Closed Presidential Primary

Following Maine's presidential caucus, Senator Justin Alford of Portland attempted to fast-track a bill that would change Maine's presidential caucus system to a closed primary system that excludes almost 37% of the state's voters – the independents. In an article about the bill in *Bangor Daily News*, "[Change to Closed primary Could Cost Maine Taxpayers more than \\$1M](#)," Sen Alford was quoted as saying that "voters who want to participate could enroll in a party the day of the primary." During a conversation before the committee testimony, Alford said all taxpayers would foot the bill for the primary regardless of their party affiliation.



Despite there being little public notice of a hearing, a number of Maine residents immediately sought to publicize the closed door machinations, and sought the aid of IndependentVoting.org and other organizations to do so.

Bob Croce of Dedham drew up a statement highlighting the infringement of the public's right to participation, signed on by IndependentVoting.org and a number of local organizations. The statement reads: "We believe public participation is vital in helping to ensure majority rule as defined in our Constitution. We urge the Maine legislature to adhere to open government meeting laws and to encourage, not dissuade, a vocal and informed public. For our democracy to work, it's important to include the public voice."

"The current rush to pass a partisan primary is mired in the past when Maine should be moving into the future," said Joe Pickering, an activist with IndependentVoting.org and a Bangor resident. *"I take issue with Sen Alford's position. This proposal undermines the decision 37% of Maine voters have made to be independent and register as they see fit."*



Changing the "Rules of the Game"

[Join IndependentVoting.org's network of activists](#)

and leaders from across the country on
our next National Conference Call.

Dial in to hear a briefing from
IndependentVoting.org President, Jacqueline Salit
on the state of the independent movement,
our democracy, and an independent perspective
on the presidential race.

Tuesday, April 26, 8pm ET

[Register for the call here](#)

Profiles in Independence:

PJ Steiner, Utah

PJ Steiner is a leader of Utah League of Independents. "I grew up in Idaho and Utah. Pretty conservative places so I started out as a Republican. I've always been fairly entrepreneurially minded so I also identified with the "business" portion of the Republican Party. Over time, I realized that the Republicans lacked a certain social conscience that I valued. This led me to be a Democrat. After spending some time with the Democrats, I realized there wasn't a political party I identified with.



PJ Steiner

"While wondering where I belonged politically, I started to notice the word independent being mentioned again and again on various news programs. I started doing some research online to figure out what being independent meant. While online, I found Utah League of Independent Voters (ULIV) and Randy Miller. I sent him an email and he reached out to me. After a few conversations, I realized that I was indeed an independent voter. I also found that being an independent seriously limited my ability to participate in Utah's primary elections.

"My experiences in New York attending the National Conference of Independent Voters reinforced the beliefs I had come to realize on my own. But I also learned that my political thoughts were not congruent with "our way or the highway" party politics. Joining a party that doesn't support or represent my feelings on various political issues would be violating the very beliefs I had long struggled to realize. So today, I work with Randy and other independent voters in Utah to try to level the playing field for all voters."

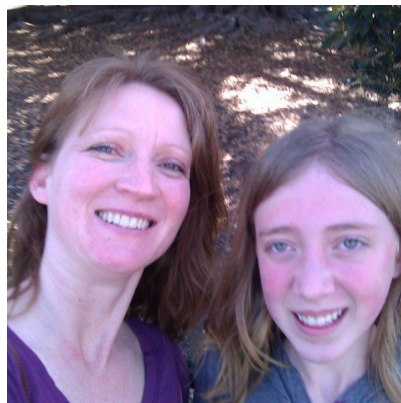
In the News

- Alvaader Frazier, Esq. and David Belmont penned an editorial: "**So Why Can't We Vote For Bernie Sanders**" about independents' exclusion from the presidential primary in New York (*Black Star News*).
- Cynthia Carpathios of Independent Ohio wrote this letter, "**Ohio Must Reform Primary System**," about her experience on primary day (*Canton Repository*).
- Barbara Patrizzi, member of Independent Pennsylvanians, penned "**Independents Deserve a Voice**" (*Philadelphia Enquirer*).
- Murray Dabby, coordinator of Georgia Independent Voters, appeared on *NPR* talking about independent voters. [Listen here](#).
- John Opdycke on **BK Live** talks about New York's exclusionary voting laws (*BRIC TV*).

- Jackie Salit is quoted in this column by Michael Memoli (*Los Angeles Times*) "**Sanders Faces a Hard Reality in New York: Some of His Most Ardent Backers Can't Vote for Him.**"



Following an interesting and provocative discussion with author Lisa McGirr, the author of *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* on the recent Politics for the People conference call, the book club is celebrating National Poetry Month by featuring poems chosen or written by P4P members. **Here are two beautiful poems** written by Tiani Coleman, the President of New Hampshire Independent Voters ("Voyage to Independence") and one written by her daughter, Kira ("My Mother is an Activist") about the experience of growing up with a mother who is a political activist. Check out the **Politics for the People blog** for more submissions and stay tuned for the announcement of the book's next selection and author.



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