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National Organizations of Independent Voters, Advocates for Fair Elections Join Fight Against SB 69

National organizations representing independent voters and advocating for fair and open elections have joined a coalition of South Dakota groups fighting against SB 69, the bill restricting signature gathering opportunities for independent candidates.

South *Dakota Free Press* blogger Cory Heidelberger writes:

IndependentVoting.org, a national group that has promoted Independent voting rights and candidates since the 1990s, has begun contacting its members and allies in South Dakota to encourage them to sign and circulate petitions to refer Senate Bill 69. This national organization calls SB 69's provision to take away registered party voters' right to sign petitions for Independent candidates "outrageously undemocratic." South Dakota Voice of Independents, which is affiliated with IndependentVoting.org, is helping contact South Dakota Independents and distribute SB 69 referendum petitions. IndependentVoting.org says that so far, the Independent South Dakota voters it has contacted overwhelmingly agree that SB 69 should be repealed.

Kim Wright, founder of South Dakota Voice of Independents, added:

We welcome the involvement of national organizations. It only underscores how serious an attack on democracy SB 69 really is. In my opinion, it's unconstitutional. But beyond the legal issue, voters don't really understand the restrictions that independents already face under the current system. SB 69 will further undermine the voice and wishes of South Dakota voters by limiting who can participate in placing candidates on the ballot. SB 69 has so much to do with one party domination in our state. It's an absolute

necessity to defeat it to preserve democracy in SD and we need to respond strongly.

SB 69 has also drawn the ire of the Coalition for Free and Open Elections. COFOE's field representative and *Ballot Access News* author Richard Winger. Winger testified against SB 69 in January.

Now COFOE has issued a resolution supporting the referendum of Senate Bill 69. It reads:

In March of this year, the South Dakota Legislature passed a bill that prohibits voters who are registered with a party from signing a ballot access petition for an Independent candidate. Senate Bill 69 limits voter choice by making it more difficult for an Independent candidate to gain ballot access.

Everyone should have the right to sign a petition for an independent candidate. Party affiliation is not the same issue for independents as it is for partisans. SB 69 makes it difficult for Independent candidates to reach the signature requirement by reducing the number of voters who are qualified to sign to just those unaffiliated with a party. And in so doing it reduces voter choice in the general election and prevents a Democrat or Republican who is dissatisfied with their party's candidate from helping to mount a challenge.

IndependentVoting.org is a member of COFOE, as are FairVote, the Constitution Party, Green Party of the US, Libertarian Party, Reform Party USA, and Socialist Party USA.

This diverse assortment of Independents and third parties joins the Centrist Project in condemning the South Dakota Legislature's effort to keep Independents off the ballot and chip away at South Dakotans' voting rights.

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