



*April 23, 2019*

## Unrig Summit 2019 - Dr. Jessie Fields Talks Health and Democracy

Two thousand reform activists congregated in Nashville for the Unrig Summit 2019, the second organized by Represent.Us. It was a three-day symposium of workshops with organizers and participants from grassroots leaders to celebrities. Check out *IVN's "Unrig Summit Celebrates Historic Victories Over Two Party Duopoly"* and *RealClearPolitics's "Political Reformers Gain Steam with an Eye on 2020"* for more details.

On a panel entitled "Overpriced and Overprescribed: Healthcare Costs in the Age of Big Money," Dr. Jessie Fields, board member of Independent Voting and a primary care physician in Harlem gave a powerful and well received presentation on the opioid epidemic, talking in personal terms of her relationship to the issue, both as a medical doctor and as a relative of someone dealing with opioid addiction. Dr. Fields noted that there are many places to put blame, but fundamentally, the way to deal with the crisis is to open up the



(L to R: Emily Walden, Juliana Keeping, Dr. Jessie Fields, Wendell Potter)

democratic process so that political decisions and policy-making are in the hands of the people. She explained that until we're willing to address the process -- and how partisanship exploits differences between communities and people -- we're not going to be able to solve it.



Three democracy reform leaders: Steve Hough of Florida Fair and Open Primaries, Desmond Meade, Executive Director of Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, and Dr. Jessie Fields of Independent Voting

Dr. Fields eloquently traced the opioid crisis back to the "war on drugs" in the 80's which, because drug addiction was criminalized, failed to understand the problem and build adequate facilities and creative approaches for dealing with this issue. So now, when the opioid crisis is an epidemic affecting all communities, we have no infrastructure for people to turn to. She brought a timely message: we must craft an extensive expansion of democracy and inclusion so there will be a significant counterweight to the politics of special interests and division.

Commented Fields about the panel: "It was very meaningful to give my personal experience of the opioid crisis in my family and in my work as a doctor to the panel and audience and to meet people from around the country who are involved in medical care and in the political reform movement."

## Basketball Battles and Political Scores (Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Game)

In her latest *IVN* column, Jackie Salit begins:

"With politics in a permanent state of chaos, we might have to look outside the political sphere to be grounded politically. At least I do. Sports is a good place to turn -- real sports, not the blood sport of partisanship and governance."



She continues: "I've become convinced over many years in political life that the game of politics often brings out the worst in people, unlike sports which can often bring out the best. Donald Trump has elevated 'the worst' to a high art form, but he is simply the product of a corrupted political system that thrives on self-dealing, self-aggrandizement, and self-perpetuation."

[Read Jackie Salit's complete column here.](#)

## Eyes on 2020 Update

In 2016, 26 million independent voters were excluded from the presidential primaries.

Currently, the Democratic and Republican state parties are finalizing the rules that will govern their 2020 presidential primary process. Independents across the country, through Independent Voting's **Eyes on 2020** campaign, are working to intersect that process and demand that the presidential primaries be open in every state.

Over 950 independent leaders and activists signed onto a letter to the Democratic National Committee chair Tom Perez penned by Independent Voting President Jackie Salit earlier this year requesting a meeting. To date, Chairman

Perez has neither scheduled nor declined. When Chairman Perez appeared at the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network annual convention in New York City this month, Independent Voting Vice President for National Development Cathy Stewart found an opportunity to speak with him. Stewart remarked, "I reminded the Chairman that he is sitting with a letter from independent leaders from across the country asking for a meeting to discuss our concerns about the presidential primaries. It was clear he did not expect to hear about the letter! Our campaign is one of vigilance looking for every opportunity to put the issue on the table."

The Candidate Outreach Committee has been sending letters of inquiry to the presidential candidates, working to meet them on the campaign trail and get them on the record.



Cathy Stewart approached DNC Chair Tom Perez at the National Action Network Convention attended by 13 presidential hopefuls.

At a Democracy Town Hall In New Hampshire, Tiani Coleman of New Hampshire Independent Voters submitted a question to event moderator Larry Lessig to **ask presidential candidate Andrew Yang about his position on opening the primaries**. Yang said: "I vastly prefer open primaries. I think having a diversity of perspectives is important. And also if you are trying to win a general election, you have to appeal to people who might not already be registered members of your party."

Randy Fricke, Chair of Western Colorado Independent Voters sent a letter to Senator Bernie Sanders. Rick Robol, Esq., former Chairman of Ohio Veterans for Bernie Sanders, also penned a letter that ten other independents active in the 2016 Sanders campaign signed onto. Their letter asks Sanders to call on the state chairs in states with closed presidential primaries to open them for 2020.



Rick Robol (in hat) at 2016 meeting of Ohio Veterans and Sen. Bernie Sanders

Steve Richardson of Virginia Independent Voters Association wrote a letter to Beto O'Rourke (Richardson had also written one to potential Republican contender William Weld). Said Richardson:

".... what interests me most about your announcement is a statement in your interview with Gayle King : 'We're gonna have to fix this democracy and make it work for and represent everyone.' ...Would you be willing to meet with me and Independent Voting's President, Jackie Salit , to discuss the opportunity to make this the most open presidential election in U.S. history?"

In a letter to Pete Buttigieg, Sarah Lyons, Independent Voting's Director of Communications, and Dr. Jessie Fields wrote:

"...we appreciated your comments about independents, how ideology and centrism are not fruitful ways to reach us, and how the tension between democracy and capitalism may be the greatest challenge of our time. We have been organizing independents for 35 years -- not as a base for a party but as first responders to the crisis in American democracy and as change agents for much needed political reforms."

At the grassroots, our letter writing campaign is intensifying. At the Unrig Summit last month, we launched **a letter to the chairs of the Democratic and Republican National Committees** .

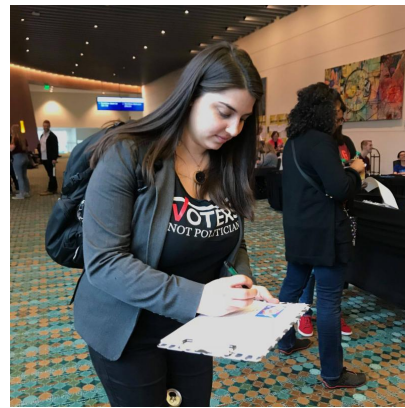
Among the signers was Katie Fahey, founder of Voters Not Politicians, the organization that successfully led a campaign for independent redistricting in Michigan last year and former Senator Nina Turner, former president of Our Revolution and co-chair of Senator Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign.



## Sign on to the letter to the DNC and RNC Chairs Tom Perez and Ronna McDaniel here

Targeted letters are circulating in several states with closed presidential primaries. If you are in one of these states, please sign and share today by clicking on the state below. If you'd like to get involved, you can reach out to the local **Eyes on 2020** leader listed.

- **Arizona:** **Al Bell**, Independent Voters for Arizona
- **Connecticut:** **Rev. Carl McLuster** and **Kirsten Fulda**
- **Florida:** **Steve Hough**, Florida Fair and Open Primaries
- **Maryland:** **Dona Sauerburger**, Independent Voters of Maryland
- **New Jersey:** **Sue Davies**, New Jersey Independent Voters
- **Pennsylvania:** **Jenn Bullock**, Independent Pennsylvanians



Katie Fahey, the leader and founder of Voters Not Politicians signing the open letter to DNC and RNC Chairs urging them to open the Presidential Primaries to independent voters

We continue to draw attention to the exclusion of independents through the media. Jenn Bullock, Director of Independent Pennsylvanians, just had **her Letter to the Editor** published in *PennLive* where she wrote, "I can't vote in Pennsylvania's primary like 1.2 million other voters in our state. That's because Pennsylvania primaries are closed, which locks out folks who are not in the two parties, even though the primaries are publicly funded events. We are among the 39% to 45% self-identifying as independent across the country."

You can participate in the Eyes on 2020 campaign in a number of ways.

**Click here to donate .**

Email **[national@independentvoting.org](mailto:national@independentvoting.org)** to become involved.



Jenn Bullock

## Activists Fight to Open the Primaries in Maine

On April 3, nearly forty supporters of opening Maine's primary delivered testimony to the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee in favor of LD 211, "An Act To Open Maine's Primaries." After winning the fight for Ranked Choice Voting, Maine activists have turned their attention to the



fight for open primaries. Open Primaries Maine, led by Kyle Bailey and Kaitlin LaCasse, is working with Independent Voting, Open Primaries and Mainers for Open Elections as part of the Eyes on 2020 campaign to make sure the primaries are open to independents.

Said Kaitlin LaCasse, Campaign Manager, "For over two hours, citizens from across the state and across the political spectrum testified about the importance of allowing all voters to participate in elections. No one showed up to testify in opposition to opening Maine's primaries to Unenrolled (aka

independent) voters. Given that 80% of Maine voters support opening Maine's primaries, we are optimistic that unenrolled voters will soon be able to participate in primary elections."



Kaitlin LaCasse

Bob Croce, co-chair of Mainers for Open Elections, an affiliate of Independent Voting testified and pushed for an "ought to pass" (OTP) recommendation which would send the bill out of committee for a full House and Senate vote.

Said Croce: " All voters should be able to participate without needing to enroll in a party. The moral reasons for open primaries are clear. Maine has led the nation in clean elections and ranked choice voting. Let's join the increasing number of states that are moving from closed to open primaries. It's time to stop feeding the partisan beast."

Cathy Stewart, Vice President for National Development of Independent Voting, added her written testimony: "Maine would cement its position as a visionary state that provides fairness to all its voters at every stage of the process with the passage of LD 211." Stewart pointed out that Maine is one of nine states where independents are the largest constituency, with 34.88% of voters "Unenrolled."



Bob Croce, testifying at hearing

Carol Poole of Casco, Julia Smucker of Portland and Bia Winter of Mt. Vernon responded to Independent Voting's call and sent in written testimony.

In her testimony, Smucker talks about her experience as an independent in a closed primary state in 2016:

"When I decided on a presidential candidate I could support, I was faced with the unconscionable choice of either essentially lying by registering with a party I did not identify with, or having no say until the general election, by which time the major parties had selected nominees I could not support another unconscionable choice. ... As an independent voter, I believe in putting principles over party."



Julia Smucker

Said Poole: "I take pride in the fulfillment of my responsibilities of active participation in the total voting process: maintaining the ideals of a true representative democracy. Imagine my shock and anger when attempting to vote in the 2018 primary, discovering I would be denied the vote unless I declared a party affiliation. I was required to give up my independent status, declare a party, and then I could vote by giving up my rights and responsibility as a citizen, even though my tax dollars pay for primaries!"

Bia Winter, a registered Democrat all her life, said about her support for LD 211: "That's what democracy is all about, and this should be a No-Brainer for ANYONE, regardless of party affiliations. Please do the right thing and pass LD 211, a bill to open Maine's primaries to the 34.88% of Mainers who are 'Unenrolled' (aka indies)."



Bia Winter

[Check out Bangor's Fox-ABC coverage of the hearing here.](#)

## Eyes on 2020 in Florida

The Miami-Dade Democratic Party passed a resolution with 80% support for allowing independent voters to participate in Democratic Party primaries, including presidential primaries. This is the first step in the resolution coming before the full state party in the fall of this year.

**Jeffrey Solomon**, a chiropractor and leader of the Miami-Dade Party initiated the resolution.

Like a growing number of local Democratic Party leaders, Solomon recognizes the importance of welcoming independents into the process.

Said Solomon: "In Miami-Dade, Florida, my fellow Democrats are beyond the fear of boogie men in N.P.A. ("No Party Affiliation") cloaks trying to game their primary. We clearly understand, the more people that vote the more Democrats get elected. We understand if we are inviting, and show good will to the disenfranchised in our primary, they will be likely to join us in the general."

Commented **Steve Hough**, Chair of **Florida Fair and Open Elections**, who has been working with Solomon: "As we continue to fight for open primaries statewide, Jeff Solomon's efforts to pass a resolution for opening the Florida Democratic presidential primary is a huge development. He shepherded the resolution through the Miami-Dade Executive Committee, and now it will be voted on by the full party in October. His work on behalf of the 3.6 million independents in Florida is invaluable, and we applaud him. For that, Democrats will soon be the party that leads Florida for decades to come."



Dr. Jeffrey Solomon

**Late Breaking News: The resolution has now also passed in Brevard County.**

Read media coverage in the [Miami Herald](#) and [Florida Today](#).

## A Welcoming Phone Call

If you've recently signed up to learn more about Independent Voting or to join our growing network across the country, you might have received (or be receiving soon) a call from a member of Independent Voting's Welcome Committee. Composed of a crackerjack team of independent activists from California, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Nevada, Ohio and Pennsylvania, the job of the Welcome Committee is to reach every independent who is looking to connect with Independent Voting. Thousand of independents are reaching out to us through Facebook, through the Independent Voting website, or perhaps after taking Independent Voting's summer survey in 2018. The team's goal is to welcome them and orient them to our work. We are letting them know about some of the programs available to them and asking them to **become a member, sponsor, or sustainer** of Independent Voting.

Committee members have been sharing their experience of being independents. Many of those who receive calls are pleasantly surprised that they have an opportunity to connect independent-to-independent with activists on the team ( some who bring with them years of organizing experience, some who are new to the independent movement) and share why they're independent.



Donna Plunkett

Said team-member Donna Plunkett of Ohio: "I've enjoyed talking to everyone. Everyone I speak with feels our representatives are not responsive or accountable to the voters and that neither party is willing to compromise."

Evelyn Dougherty, Chair of Massachusetts Coalition of Independent Voters said: "Lowell Ward and I are enjoying speaking with New Englanders and welcoming them to the independent movement. People are super friendly and I love having these conversations and asking people about themselves.

Independents are really looking for an opportunity to talk about why they're independent. One lady from Maine told me that she's been an independent for years and a member of many groups and people in these groups insisted on ignoring that she was an independent. We're working on two more indies joining our calling team this month."



Evelyn Dougherty,  
Lowell Ward



Allen Cox

Allen Cox, a member of the New York team, shared his experience speaking to independents: "My experience is that people are waiting to hear from others who feel the same way that they do about challenging the two-party system!"



And from Lou Hinman, New York: "Watching the news and reading the newspapers, you would think there's nothing happening in America but a struggle between the DP and the RP. I love making calls to independents all over the country, to tell them (and remind myself) that we are not alone."



Sue Davies

Sue Davies, leader of New Jersey Independent Voters and member of the committee, commented: "When independents are told we don't exist, having conversations with other independents is really critical. Giving people an opportunity to connect and talk as an independent about what they think is really important. It allows them to give expression to who they are."



Lou Hinman

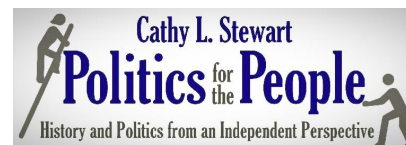
If you'd like to join the Welcome Committee team, contact Gwen Mandell at [gmandell@independentvoting.org](mailto:gmandell@independentvoting.org)

## Mark Your Calendar

Independent Voting's next conference call, *How To See Clearly in Confusing Times: Some Thoughts for Independents* is on **Monday, May 13th at 8:00 pm Eastern Time**. Join hundreds of independents on Jackie Salit's National Conference Call. This is the largest regular gathering of independents in the national independent community. [Register here.](#)



The **Politics for the People Book Club** has announced its next selection: *The Line Becomes A River* by Francisco Cantú. Cantú will be the guest of Cathy Stewart, Independent Voting's Vice President for National Development and founder of P4P, on the next book club conference call, **Sunday, June 2 at 7:00 pm EST**.



Spokesperson Training with Independent Voting Director of Communications, Sarah Lyons - **Third Thursday of every month**. Contact Sarah at [slyons15@gmail.com](mailto:slyons15@gmail.com) if you'd like to join the next training.



Sarah Lyons

## Profiles in Independence

Tejas Muthusamy, Glen Allen, Virginia

Young people are often left out of the political sphere. We can't vote, after all. However, what political pundits seem to not realize is that, in just a few years, my generation will finally gain the right to vote. As we have seen with walk-outs and protests, Generation Z is already as political as generations past, and that interest in politics will only carry forward throughout our future. Unfortunately, one of the most paralyzing things about being a minor in politics is large barriers to action. For one, we simply can't vote our preferred candidates into office, so we are forced to be bystanders. We also aren't always taken as seriously in political discussions, despite often having unique ideas. This leads to young people becoming disinterested in and disenfranchised from politics at such an early age, which can lead to disastrous consequences in the future.

As a high school student from Richmond, Virginia, I have seen many of these problems firsthand. My friends often proclaim that their voices don't matter. My classmates refrain from getting involved in politics because they don't think they can make a difference. I hope to change that. Working in conjunction with Independent Voting, I hope to create a network of "Young Independents" across the nation. We have seen time and time again in this country that, if those under 18 band together, a great difference can be made!



Tejas Muthusamy

**If you are a young person or know of a young person who would like to get involved, contact Tejas at [muthusamy.tejas@gmail.com](mailto:muthusamy.tejas@gmail.com)**

## **In the News**

Read "**California May Move to 'Unrig' Rules Affecting Independents**" ( *New York Magazine*)

Letter to the Editor from **Robert Pearce** of Marysville, Washington, "**Lawsuit Should Challenge Rule to Declare Party for Primary**" ( *HeraldNet*)

More about the Democratic Party of Washington's decision to close the 2020 presidential primaries: "**Political parties flourish from state subsidy**" ( *Wahkiakum Eagle*)

**Jim Lundberg** of Independent Pennsylvanians was one of the panelists on a *CNN* segment about the Mueller Report. **Click here to view.** ( *CNN*)

" **A Presidential Primary for Independents in 2020?**" speaks of the **Independent Voter Project's** call in California for a public presidential primary ballot that would allow any voter, regardless of party, to vote for any candidate. (*IVN*)

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