

EYES ON

2020

2020

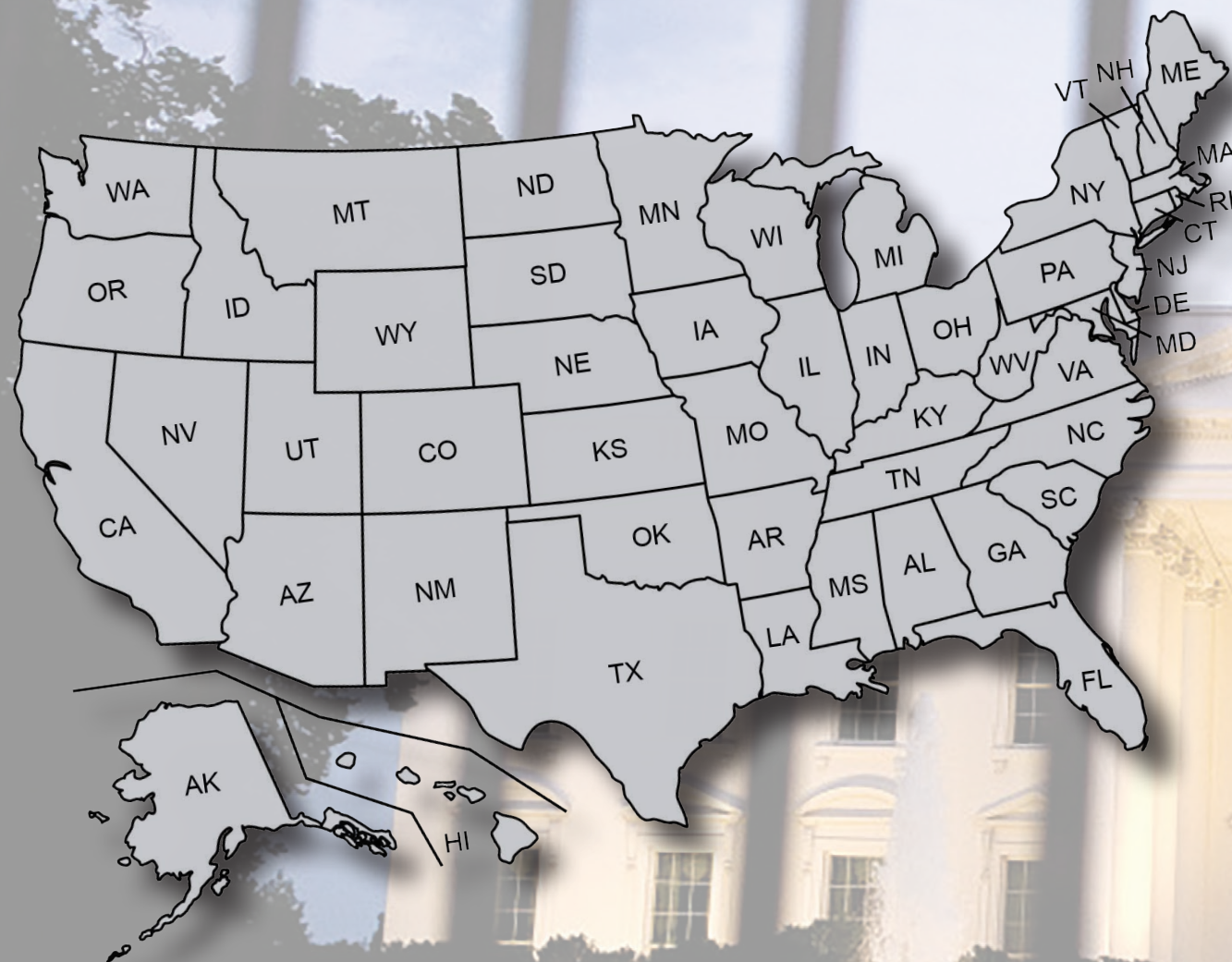
2020

2020

AN INTERIM REPORT

No American should be forced to join a political party to be able to participate in the presidential primaries.

In 2016, over 26 million voters were barred from voting in the presidential primaries.



Independents want full access to EVERY stage of the presidential election process in EVERY state.

Legally, the Democratic and Republican parties have the authority to open the presidential primaries to independents.

2020

Independent Voting, the largest organization of independent voters in the country, launched EYES ON 2020 in January 2019.

EYES ON 2020 is pressuring the Democratic and Republican parties to open the presidential primaries and caucuses to independent voters.



A message from Jackie Salit President, Independent Voting

We launched EYES ON 2020 in January of this year to address a hidden form of voter suppression in our national election process—the exclusion of close to 26 million independents from the presidential primaries. We wanted to test the willingness of the parties to adapt themselves to a new and permanent set of circumstances in our democracy—namely that upwards of 45% of Americans have become independents. They have no intention of giving up their independence to join a political party.

Everyone in the political world is aware that independent voters supported House Democratic candidates over Republicans in the 2018 midterms and gave the Democratic Party a House majority for the first time in ten years. Two years earlier, independents broke for Donald Trump. This community of voters is in motion, and while it will not declare a partisan allegiance, it does “want in” at all levels of voting.

More than 90% of nonaligned voters want the right to vote in the presidential primaries. The EYES ON 2020 campaign asks the parties to recognize and respect this. The parties have the power to do so, without legislative or judicial action. They should exercise that power.

No American should be required to join a political party as a condition of voting and no taxpayer should be funding an election in which they cannot vote. These are simple democratic principles.

I end with a word about the members of the EYES ON 2020 Cabinet and the independents across the country that have been working on this effort—gathering signatures, meeting with party leaders, writing letters to the editor, not taking no for an answer. They are standing up for something vital and achievable. A democratic America.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jacqueline Salit'.

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The EYES ON 2020 Interim Report is a publication of Independent Voting.

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Independent Voting is a national strategy, communications and organizing center working to connect and empower the 46% of Americans who identify themselves as independents. Our mission is to develop a movement of independent voters, in partnership with Americans of all persuasions, to reform America's political process, create unorthodox coalitions and use our democracy to develop our nation.



December 12, 2018

Tom Perez, Chair
Democratic National Committee
430 South Capitol Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Chairman Perez,

I write on behalf of the 34 million independent voters who cast their ballots on Election Day. I am the President of Independent Voting, the country's largest organization of independent voters. I am joined in this outreach by leaders and activists from our network. We represent America's growing community of independents, now 44% of the electorate. We come from across the country and from all walks of life, from diverse backgrounds and communities.

Exit polling in the midterms shows that independent voters supported House Democratic candidates over Republicans at a rate of 54% to 42%. This support gave the Democratic Party control of the House for the first time in ten years. That means approximately 18 million independents voted for Democratic congressional candidates. Furthermore, more independents came out to vote in the midterms than did in 2014, resulting in a 38% increase in our participation in the November 6th election. It is also worth noting that the political reforms enacted through popular initiatives in Michigan, Colorado, Missouri, Maryland, Florida and Utah had huge levels of support from independent voters.

Our numbers are growing, and, increasingly, we are making the difference in the outcome of elections, while also charting a path for democratic reform. But we are a misunderstood and under-recognized force in the electorate. Contrary to media and pundit spin, we are not "leaners" and we have no interest in becoming either Democrats or Republicans. We wish to remain as independents and we wish to be recognized and respected as such.


In 2016, independent voters were locked out or otherwise restricted in the presidential primaries in 27 states. This meant that over 26 million Americans could not fully participate in the process of electing the President. As you no doubt recall, there was public outcry over this exclusion, particularly from young voters unfamiliar with the closed systems. They were stunned on primary day when they could not vote. In some states—like Arizona where 41% of Latinos are registered as independents, or Florida, where recent surveys indicate 39% of Latinos and 31% of African Americans identify as independents—this exclusion negatively impacts the voting rights of minorities.

We do not want to experience this kind of exclusion again in 2020, and we are reaching out to pursue ways to remedy this problem. Based on the estimated number of independents who voted for the Democrats in the midterms, and the number who were excluded in 2016, we surmise that your party could attract as many as 14 million additional independent voters in the 2020 primaries, if those elections were open to non-aligned voters. In 2016, your state party organizations in Oklahoma, Alaska, California, South Dakota and Nebraska changed their party rules to allow independents to vote. No judicial or legislative action was required. Every state party should do this in 2020.

While we, the undersigned, make no pledge or commitment with regard to supporting any particular 2020 presidential candidate—Democratic, Republican, minor party or independent—we believe the time has come for both governing parties, and for the Democratic Party in particular, to take the decisive step of opening the 2020 presidential primaries to independents. Your party has announced that its first order of business in the new Congress will be the introduction of HB1, a political reform bill. However, to be a truly inclusive democracy, non-aligned voters must have full access to the electoral process, which HB1 does not address.

We, the undersigned, represent thousands of activists across the country working towards achieving full voting rights for *all* Americans. We hope that you will be available to discuss these issues at the soonest possible moment.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Salit
President

**928 independent activists
from all 50 states signed
onto this letter.**

For the Record...

"Whatever their reasons - aversion to partisan rhetoric and extremes, preference for moderate views from both sides of the aisle, disillusionment with politics as usual - a growing number of Americans and Marylanders are opting not to associate with a political party. By creating incentive for elected officials to cross party lines and work together, open primaries have the potential to cultivate a less polarized, healthier, and more productive political climate."

- Governor
Larry Hogan,
Maryland

"There are the forms of voter suppression everyone knows about and then there are the more insidious forms. Barring independent voters from voting in presidential primaries is one of those. We must change that in this cycle."

- Daniel R. Ortega, Jr.
Attorney, and immediate
past Chair of the Board of
Directors of National Council of La Raza

"When we ran our campaign in Michigan to take down partisan gerrymandering, we saw firsthand how important it was to involve all voices, regardless of party affiliation. Every American deserves a say in our political process. That means every voter deserves access to vote in our presidential primaries."

- Katie Fahey
Founder, Voters not
Politicians
Executive Director,
The People

"...the Democratic Party benefits by the inclusion of independent voters — now 21 percent of the Nebraska electorate...independents have personal reasons why they do not affiliate with a party... by embracing independents, some may change their view of the Democratic Party."

- Jane Kleeb,
Nebraska Democratic Party
State Chair

"We risk losing an entire generation of open-minded voters if we don't embrace and respect their desire to identify and register as independents. They will vote for our candidates. But not if they feel disrespected."

- Aaron McKinney
State Committeeman,
Miami-Dade Executive
Committee

"Independent voters should be allowed to vote in Arizona's Presidential Preference Election next March...particularly because their tax dollars fund it. Fair is fair."

- Adrian Fontes,
Maricopa County
Recorder

...Voices of Democracy

ARIZONA

As Arizona Secretary of State, Katie Hobbs is the senior State elections official. Her Elections Division advises that Arizona statutes require voters to register with a “recognized” party to vote in the Presidential Preference Election (PPE), which means 1.25 million independents will be barred.

Private political parties can decide to allow independent voters to vote on their PPE ballot just by deciding to do so.

Until recently, having a serious conversation with the party power structure in Arizona about voting rights for independents could not have happened. It is happening now to an astonishing degree, with Tim Castro ably opening doors and coordinating our outreach.

Independent Voters for Arizona and Independent Voting advocates have been holding serious conversations with key elected and Democratic Party leaders. They have been highly positive, though not yet conclusive.

State Senator Martin Quezada proposed legislation to permit independent voters to vote in the PPE. While it went nowhere, he met with us, encouraged our endeavors, and shared important insights. We met Katie Hobbs, who clearly supported our cause and appreciated information about the 1986 Supreme Court decision.

One of our most outspoken allies is Adrian Fontes, Maricopa County Recorder, who is in charge of elections in the fastest growing county in the U.S., with 4.4 million of Arizona’s estimated 7 million people. He is actively involved in promoting our case to Democratic leadership, recently declaring, “Including non-party voters in our Presidential Preference Elections is a no-brainer. I’m completely dedicated to making this happen so that we can continue to engage more Americans in our democracy. I’m going to work with state and local officials and party folks to try to make this a reality in 2020.”

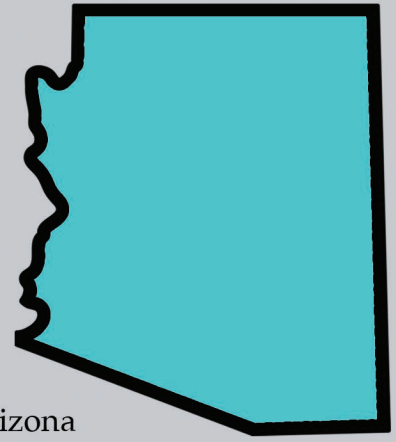
Felecia Rotellini chairs the Arizona Democratic Party. In late May, our team sat down with the chair, Quiana Dickenson, the Political Director, and Kelly Paisley, the Chief of Staff. Advocating for the importance of opening the PPE at a time when 40% of the Latino community in Arizona are independent was Danny Ortega, an attorney, a Democrat, and immediate past Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Council of La Raza. It was a fruitful discussion that added to the growing conversation inside the party.

Arizona will be a pivotal state in 2020. Independent voters are more numerous than Democrats and slightly fewer than Republicans. Perhaps the most watched Senate campaign in the nation pits Mark Kelly against Martha McSally.

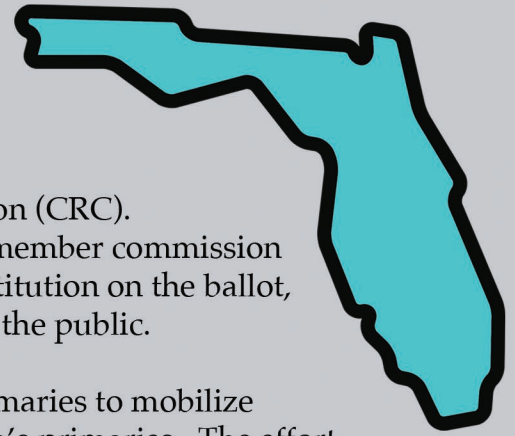
The Arizona Republican Party is planning to cancel their PPE altogether. We are going to continue to press the Democratic Party through our postcard campaign, letters and meetings. This spring, two ASU students – Guy Tiano and McKenzie Sadeghi – penned an op-ed in the *Arizona Capitol Times* about independents being “silenced” in the PPE. It has been circulated widely. Our second op-ed in the *Arizona Capitol Times* penned by Al Bell is in its third week of posting, and has provoked much discussion, including an opposing op-ed by Republican activist Constantin Querard.

We have a strong leadership team in Al Bell, Tim Castro, Denny Flaherty, and Cathy Stewart from the national office, and a growing network of activists. Stay tuned!

- Al Bell & Tim Castro



FLORIDA



In early 2017, Florida convened their Constitution Revision Commission (CRC). It is a process unique to Florida that occurs every twenty years. A 37-member commission is given the authority to place proposed amendments to the state constitution on the ballot, and public hearings are held throughout the state to solicit input from the public.

Florida Fair and Open Primaries (FFAOP) joined forces with Open Primaries to mobilize Floridians to attend the hearings and speak in favor of opening Florida's primaries. The effort was more successful than we hoped; open primaries was the second most popular issue discussed, and our supporters were passionate! But while we mobilized, garnered significant media coverage, and partnered with a commissioner to introduce an amendment that made it through committee, the Commission punted.

I was not discouraged. After the CRC thumbed their noses at us, we created a political committee and began circulating our own petitions for a top two open primary and to prohibit public funding for primaries that continued to exclude independents.

The FFAOP network collected 8,500 signatures with an eye towards attracting significant financial support. In late 2018, billionaire Mike Fernandez, a lifelong Republican turned independent, announced to the *Miami Herald* that primary reform was going to be his new focus. One of the wealthiest people in Florida was going to pour millions into our issue and fund a 2020 ballot campaign. Not bad!

At that point, FFAOP focused attention on the national EYES ON 2020 campaign.

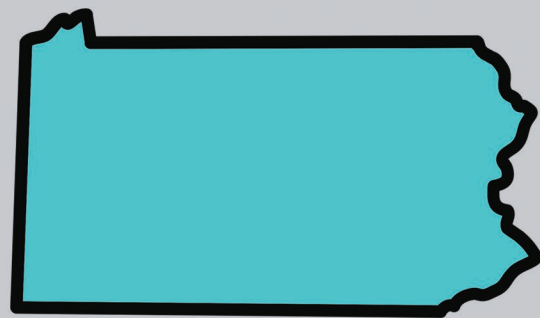
We sent a copy of Jackie Salit's letter to Tom Perez to the Chair of the Florida Democratic Party, and began collecting signatures for an online letter urging the chairs of the Florida Democratic and Republican parties to support opening their respective primaries to independent voters. To date, 1,125 people have signed the letter, with a goal of 5,000 before October.

In October, the Florida Democratic Party will vote on a resolution to open their primaries to independents. The resolution was first introduced by Jeffrey Solomon—a FFAOP supporter I met when he was running for the State House of Representatives in 2018 on an open primaries platform—to the Miami-Dade Democratic Executive Committee. It passed in early April, was passed the following week in Brevard County, and subsequently passed in Santa Rosa County. A member of the Miami Dade Executive Committee, Aaron McKinney, penned a strong editorial about the importance of open primaries to the younger voters and the black and latino community. The Solomon/McKinney Democratic network continues reaching out to other party officials in order to garner support prior to the state convention.

Petitions are being gathered to put a measure on the 2020 ballot. We have more allies than ever before. We are putting direct pressure on the parties to open their doors in time for the presidential primaries. We continue to see strong support in the media and new endorsements from groups like the League of Women Voters. We're on the move in Florida!

- Steve Hough

PENNSYLVANIA



These are exciting times to be an activist fighting for the voting rights of independent voters. Frankly, that is unusual. It's typically a never-ending slump up a muddy hill to tackle the two-party stronghold on our election system. As director of a grassroots activist group, Independent Pennsylvanians, we have been advocating for open primaries going on 15 years.

We are leading the Pennsylvania EYES ON 2020 campaign, where we have reached out to the chairs of the Pennsylvania Democratic and Republican Committees to invite a dialogue on the importance of opening the primaries to independents for the 2020 presidential race, and to put pressure on the state parties to open the primaries for the presidential primary. We have received wonderful media coverage on this issue. State Democratic Party Chair Nancy Mills has thus far responded by kicking the ball to the legislature to decide on such a matter. So, let's turn to the legislature....

In 2018, Independent Pennsylvanians joined forces with a coalition of election reform organizations, including: Open Primaries, Committee of Seventy, Common Cause Pennsylvania, Commonwealth Commonsense, League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, and Philly Set Go. Our focus has been to support two bills in the Pennsylvania legislature, SB 300 and HB 192, that would open the Pennsylvania primaries to independent voters. During a state government committee hearing for SB 300, T.J. Rooney and Alan Novak, former chairs of the state Democratic and Republican parties, both spoke in support of the bill. After being successfully voted out of committee, SB 300 was passed by the Pennsylvania State Senate! This is the furthest an open primaries bill has ever gotten in Pennsylvania.

Independent Pennsylvanians is proudly the grassroots-go-to-the-streets-talk-to-the-community wing of this coalition. We have been leading petition drives in multiracial communities, speaking to young people and people of color, the fastest growing segment of political independents. Our activists, along with Dr. Jessie Fields, national spokesperson for Open Primaries and Independent Voting Board Member, have been gathering hundreds of signatures and having heartening conversations with people who say that open primaries makes sense, is only fair and that everyone should have a right to vote.

We held a hugely successful and fun primary day protest in May in front of our nation's first capital in Philadelphia, gathering signatures in support of our EYES ON 2020 campaign and the open primaries bills in the legislature. Our activists were joined by leaders of Independent Voting, including Gwen Mandell, Director of National Outreach.

We know the uphill climb on a muddy hill is not even close to over, but we are definitely feeling real traction with a broad spectrum of supporters which includes major party politicians, election reform groups and - most importantly - the people on the streets we are talking to who are demanding to be heard. Power to the People not the parties. Let all voters vote.

- Jennifer Bullock

CALIFORNIA



In the last several presidential elections, the California Democratic Party has voted to open its presidential primary to independents, while the California Republican Party has not. In addition, independents must specifically request a Democratic Party ballot if they want to participate in their presidential primary election. Confusing picture. The Independent Voter Project (IVP) has launched a campaign to create an All Independents Presidential Primary in California.

Independent Voting has joined a growing coalition of reform organizations to support the campaign, including the National Association of Nonpartisan Reformers, Open Primaries, FairVote, Unite America, RepresentUs, and others.

The campaign includes both a legislative and legal strategy and seeks to create a presidential ballot for California's 5.6 million independent voters (known as "No Party Preference" voters). Every independent would receive a primary ballot that includes all the candidates running for President. Political parties can choose whether or not to count the votes from this ballot. The campaign asserts a very simple premise, "Elections should serve people, not parties."

Said Chad Peace, IVP attorney, "Let the Democratic Party have its primary ballot. Let the Republican Party have its primary ballot. Why not give California's 5 million nonpartisan taxpaying citizens who have exercised their first amendment right not to join either party the opportunity to cast a vote by simply providing them a ballot too?"

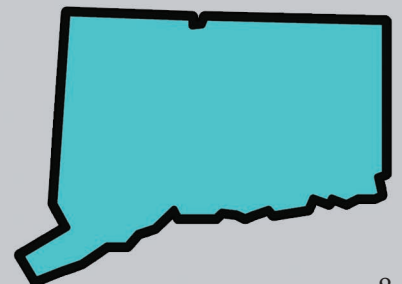
CONNECTICUT

In Connecticut, 40% of voters are independents. Both political parties conduct closed primaries, including the presidential primaries, despite the fact that there are more independents than either Democrats or Republicans.

We are using the conduct of the presidential primaries to open the conversation on achieving full voting rights for all Connecticut's voters. After Kirsten Fulda received no response to a letter asking for a meeting with Nancy Wyman, the chair of the Democratic Party, we started circulating a letter to both Wyman and J.R. Romano, the chairs of the Democratic and Republican parties respectively, urging them to open the 2020 presidential primaries. It is ironic that the landmark Supreme Court case that established the authority of the parties to determine who is allowed to vote in their primaries is from our state -Tashjian v. Republican Party - when the Connecticut Republican Party opened their primaries briefly to independents. Our goal is to make that the reality again, but this time for both parties.

We recently met with both the minority and majority leaders of the Connecticut state legislature to discuss opening the presidential primaries within their respective parties. The conversations were informative for us and educative for these elected officials. Based on our meetings this week, we expect to conduct more focused and definitive conversations with both Democratic and Republican party leadership to seek a clear path forward with both parties, even as we ramp up our efforts to organize larger numbers of independent voters in support of our goals.

- Rev. Carl McCluster



MAINE



Maine is one of nine states where independents outnumber Democrats and Republicans, comprising 35% of the electorate.

As Bob Croce, a co-founder of Mainers for Open Elections, wrote in an oped, “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...It’s time to stop feeding the partisan beast.”

This year, Open Primaries Maine spearheaded a legislative campaign to open the primaries. Mainers for Open Elections, Open Primaries and Independent Voting were among the organizations that participated in a vibrant lobbying effort to pass L.D. 211, “An Act to Open Maine’s Primaries.” There were lobby days in Augusta, scores of letters to the editor, and major editorial support from papers across the state. 70% of Mainers support opening the taxpayer funded primaries.

In May 2019, L.D. 211 came just two votes short of passing in the State Senate. As Kaitlin LaCasse, the campaign manager, pointed out, “While this bill won’t become law in 2019, we’ve made significant progress towards opening Maine’s primary to unenrolled voters. L.D. 211 received the support of Senate President Troy Jackson and House Speaker Sara Gideon; L.D. 211 earned more votes in the Maine House than any previous semi-open primaries legislation; and L.D. 211 is the first-ever semi-open primaries bill to receive a floor vote in the Maine Senate and to do so with bipartisan support.

Options and opportunities for next steps are being evaluated.

With great sadness we note the passing of Bob Croce, the co-founder of Mainers for Open Elections. We will continue Bob’s work to create a more open and inclusive democracy.

MARYLAND

Dona Sauerburger and Independent Voters of Maryland, working with Open Primaries and Independent Voting, have been steadily moving the needle on the fight to open Maryland’s primaries. This spring, the state legislature considered bills to open the primaries, to increase voter mobility, and to allow the City of Baltimore to consider establishing open primaries and Ranked Choice Voting.

Dona and Peter Taillie testified at two different hearings. During the hearing for an open primary bill (SB 385), Governor Larry Hogan submitted written testimony stating, “By opening primary elections, Senate Bill 385 would provide unaffiliated voters with a more meaningful opportunity to participate and for their voices to be heard.” In addition, the Governor spoke out on national TV, sharing his view that with open primaries, “...you wouldn’t have so much polarization in Congress.”

Dona Sauerburger is an active member of the Maryland League of Women Voters and served on the committee that examined primary reform. She played an instrumental role in the League including support for a more open primary election system in their election platform and in passing a resolution to work with other groups to accomplish genuine reform.

While no bills passed this year, there is growing momentum. Independent Voters of Maryland is currently focused on their EYES ON 2020 letter writing campaign to state party chairs, Maya Rockey Moore Cummings and Dirk Haire, asking for the presidential primaries to be open. In addition, they are working to expand their activist network with the effort.



The Elections and Elected Officials Committee recommended “do pass” on HB922.

Fortunately, the bill was not introduced for a vote during the 2019 legislative session. We will remain vigilant in educating voters and legislators about the value of open primary elections in Missouri.

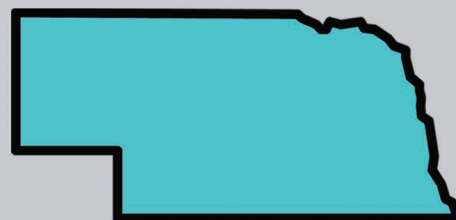
- Kim Wright

This past December, under the leadership of State Chair Jane Kleeb, the party went even further to welcome the participation of independents in their presidential process by voting to end their closed presidential caucuses and use the presidential primary to decide their delegates, keeping that primary open to the 21% of Nebraskans who are independent.

But the story does not end there. This spring, Independent Voting's Vice President, Cathy Stewart, joined with Jane Kleeb to pen an op-ed entitled "Independent Voters Help Win Elections" that's been published in the *Omaha World Herald* (NE) and the *Albany Times Union* (NY). Their op-ed makes a strong case for state Democratic parties across the country to open their presidential primaries to independents.

Jane has become an important ally in the EYES ON 2020 campaign. We have turned to her many times, seeking her counsel and asking her to reach out to fellow Democratic chair people and leaders to consider this issue and to share her experiences with independent voters and open primaries.

Jane summarized her position in a letter she sent to Maine legislators earlier this spring, “We believe that one of the most important things we can do to strengthen our party and our democracy is to invite independents, especially young voters, to participate in primaries.”



NEW JERSEY



With 40% (2.4 million) of voters choosing to be independent, New Jersey is one of nine states where independents outnumber both Democrats and Republicans. Yet, we cannot vote in the presidential primaries without joining a party. In addition, the whole process is confusing, and independents are often given the wrong information, with each district handling the situation differently.

In the 2018 Independent Voting summer survey, 87.3% of NJ independents supported opening the presidential primaries to independents. We have been putting pressure on the Democratic and Republican parties to do so by hitting the streets and collecting signatures on a letter to both party chairs. To date, both chairs have been unresponsive, so we will keep up the pressure.

We have published letters to the editor in a number of publications, including *NJ.com*, the *Post Eagle*, *Hudson Reporter*, the *Sentinel of Gloucester County*, the *Jersey Journal*, and *NJ Today* making our case.

New Jersey Independent Voters is building partnerships on this issue. NJ No Labels has joined the effort. Gina Genovese, former Mayor of Long Hill Township and a former independent candidate for Governor, has also endorsed open primaries.

Recently, Ken and Mary Johnson attended a League of Women Voters forum in southern Monmouth County. In response to Ken's question, State Senator Vin Gopal stated that he supported opening the primaries. We are looking forward to meeting with Senator Gopal and the League to pursue the conversation.

- Sue Davies

NEW YORK

"Considered by many to be the paradigm of progressivism, New York has some of the most repressive and exclusionary electoral practices of any state." - Jane Kleeb and Cathy Stewart, "Democracy, Voters the Heart of Elections," *Albany Times Union*, June 3, 2019.

For two decades, we have worked to extend full voting rights to New York independents, now 2.7 million voters. During Mayor Bloomberg's tenure, we partnered to bring nonpartisan elections to New York City, where there are more independents than Republicans. While we were not successful in winning this reform, it continues to be a critical issue.

In this year's nonpartisan special election for New York City Public Advocate, the candidates were asked if they would consider expanding nonpartisan elections. Jumaane Williams, who won the race, said it was something that should be considered.

The Pulitzer Prize winning *Riverdale Press* wrote an editorial in July advocating for open primaries. "Elections aren't designed to be pre-determined, they're supposed to express the views of the people. And those people must be heard."

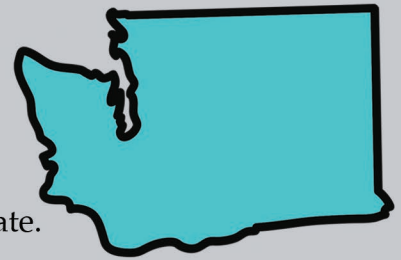
Assemblyman Fred Thiele, the lone independent New York legislator, wrote in the *Albany Times Union*, "As New York's Democratic and Republican parties set the rules for the 2020 presidential primary elections, they could — and should — open up the primary process..." We are circulating a letter to the chairs of the Democratic and Republican party, urging them to do just that! We will be continuing our outreach at the annual Harlem Week festivities this summer. The African American community continues to lead the call for full voting rights for all.



- Dr. Jessie Fields & Alvaader Frazier

WASHINGTON

Newly announced Democratic Party presidential candidate Governor Jay Inslee was about to receive a bill from the state legislature moving Washington State's 2020 presidential primary up in the calendar year to March. There was just one problem: independent voters would have to declare a party affiliation to participate.



Seven members of the Independent Voting network along with Independent Voting's Vice President for National Development Cathy Stewart quickly sent a letter to Governor Inslee calling the bill “unacceptable” and urging a veto. The letter was distributed to media outlets and reporter Jerry Cornfield of *The Daily Herald* called for comment.

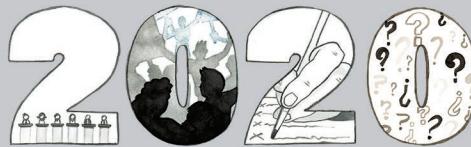
“I just spoke to Jerry,” wrote Janice Lyle, one of the signers from Marysville, WA. “I’m kind of private but this is an important topic for me. We will see what comes of it.”

Janice told the reporter she considers herself a political independent and isn’t willing to pledge allegiance to the Democratic or Republican party, even for just one election. Cornfield’s article came out a few days later, reiterating the shortcomings of the bill, quoting Janice and highlighting independents’ unfavorable reaction. “I want to continue to do my civic duties and one of those is to vote,” said Janice, “but I can’t, unless I lie, and that puts me in a bad place. There are so many of us who are not claiming either party these days and not letting us vote because we will not make the declaration is disenfranchising.” (*The Daily Herald*)

Unfortunately, Governor Inslee signed the bill.

- Sarah Lyons

SUPPORT THE EYES ON 2020 CAMPAIGN



DONATE

To support this national effort to open up the presidential primaries.

<https://tinyurl.com/donate-eyeson2020>

CONTACT US

To get connected to your local campaign activists if you are in a closed primary state.

p: 1-800-288-3201 e: national@independentvoting.org

SIGN THE LETTER

To the DNC & RNC Chairpeople to open the presidential primaries in every state.

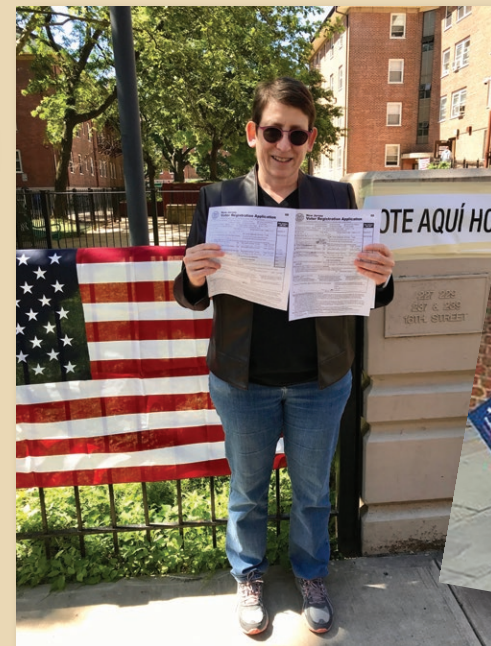
<https://tinyurl.com/sign-rnc-dnc>



EYES ON



2020



Midlands Voices: Independent voters help win elections

By Cathy Stewart and Jane KleeB

April 24, 2019



We are two women — one an independent and one a Democrat, one from New York and the other from Nebraska — who are perhaps unlikely political collaborators, but we share a view on a critical democracy issue.

Our paths crossed over a series of events on the political horizon, the 2020 presidential primary elections. It's estimated that close to 26 million Americans were barred from voting in the 2016 presidential primaries because they lived in states that did not permit independents to vote, in spite of the fact that recent surveys show that 87% of independents believe that the parties should open the presidential primaries.

In this regard, the Nebraska Democratic Party has been a democracy leader, allowing unaffiliated voters to cast ballots in the 2020 presidential primaries where their votes

will help determine the nominee. While the Nebraska Democratic Party has, since 2008, allowed unaffiliated voters to cast a ballot for other offices in the primary elections, this is the first time the votes will count towards the presidential nomination because the party previously had a caucus in place where only Democrats could participate.

Nebraska is a so-called “red state” where the majority of seats in the state Legislature and the Governor’s Office are held by Republicans. But it has unique and progressive features that should be the envy of many “blue states,” such as a nonpartisan unicameral Legislature, whose members are elected via a “top two” primary system, allowing all voters to participate.

Nebraska’s state senators approved, even overriding a veto by Gov. Ricketts, a law to

grant driver's licenses to "Dreamers," young people brought to the United States as children with their parents for a better life. In addition, Nebraska voters in 2018 approved a measure to expand Medicaid in the state.

Nebraska has 100% publicly owned utilities and does not allow charter schools to operate in the state. "Red" might be the description for statewide and federal election results, but Nebraska is one of those Great Plains states with a clear independent streak that looks out for the people.

One of us (KleeB) believes that the Democratic Party benefits by the inclusion of independent voters — now 21% of the Nebraska electorate — and recognizes that independents have personal reasons why they do not affiliate with a party and also understands that by embracing independents some may change their view of the Democratic Party. The other (Stewart) believes that no American should be forced to join a political party in order to be able to vote and recognizes that independent voters, now the fastest growing community of voters in the country, are a new force for revitalizing our democracy. Based on these beliefs, we have found a common cause.

"One of us (KleeB) believes that the Democratic Party benefits by the inclusion of independent voters — now 21% of the Nebraska electorate — and recognizes that independents have personal reasons why they do not affiliate with a party and also understands that by embracing independents some may change their view of the Democratic Party. The other (Stewart) believes that no American should be forced to join a political party in order to be able to vote and recognizes that independent voters, now the fastest growing community of voters in the country, are a new force for revitalizing our democracy. Based on these beliefs, we have found a common cause."

In the 2018 midterm elections, independents were 30% of the national electorate. These voters supported Democratic congressional candidates by 12 points, reversing the 12-point margin for Republicans of the prior midterms — a 24-point swing. They also gave notable support to important voting reforms on the ballot in six states. Independents have decided the outcome of presidential and congressional elections for the last decade but are not fully included in every step of the electoral process. We both believe it's time for that to change. It's ironic, perhaps, that reality and image conflict so totally when it comes to Nebraska and New York.

Considered by many to be part of the conservative heartland, Nebraska actually has some of the most open and inclusionary electoral practices of any state in the country. Considered by many to be the paradigm of progressivism, New York has some of the most repressive and exclusionary electoral practices of any state. That's the crossroads that brought us together. And that's at the core of our shared message. Change the rules. Open the process. Put democracy and people at the heart of our elections.

KleeB is chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party. Stewart is vice president for national development at Independent Voting and Director of the Eyes on 2020 campaign.

Independent candidates, voters have their eyes on 2020

BY SARAH LYONS

Mar 10, 2019

Recently I joined a conference call with a dozen independent voter activists from around the country — all cabinet members of the “Eyes on 2020” campaign sponsored by Independent Voting. They are making a simple demand: Independents want full access to every stage of the 2020 presidential election process in every state.

A recap of activities over the last several weeks was varied and impressive, touching on the many different ways independents are working on what is a civil rights campaign for the 40 percent of Americans (according to Gallup) who consider themselves independents.

It’s estimated that 25 million independents were excluded from voting in the 2016 presidential primaries. I was one of them. Yet what most

people don’t realize is that the power to open or close presidential primaries lies with the political parties, not with state legislatures or state governments. Opening the primaries is a matter of choice for political party organizations, a protected right established by the U.S. Supreme Court. Of course, political will is needed, too. Hence, the cabinet and the beehive of activity it is beginning to build.

Independents have been determining the outcome of national elections since 2008 and were 30 percent of the electorate in the 2018 midterms. We are a long way from knowing the outcome of 2020, but a look at the field of presidential candidates and their position on the basic democracy issue of voting rights for independents, show how independents impact on more than just election results.



Among those who have officially launched their campaigns, or are exploring a presidential run, are five advocates for open primaries: Bernie Sanders, John Delaney and Eric Swalwell on the Democratic side, and on the GOP side, the newly announced former Massachusetts Gov. Bill Weld and Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, who has not ruled out joining the primary.

Add to this list Howard Schultz, who is exploring a possible run as an independent. His support for open primaries is not yet known, but he shares independents visceral sense that our political process is broken and places responsibility on both parties who are “consistently not doing what’s necessary on behalf of the American people and are engaged every single day in revenge politics.”

Each of these candidates has taken a different path in coming to recognize and respect America’s independent voters. Sanders, an independent himself, saw how support from independents and millennials fueled his 2016 candidacy and brought him within inches of a presidential nomination. He spoke out in support of open primaries after the Nevada and New York primaries – both states he lost, which stalled his campaign’s momentum.

Delaney, a businessman new to politics when he ran for Congress in 2013, was schooled so strongly by voters in his district about the problems they experienced in Maryland’s elections that he responded by proposing comprehensive national election reform legislation (Open our Democracy Act) that included mandating open primaries.

Swalwell ran in California under the open primary system championed by former Gov. Arnold Schwarznegger, dubbed “top two,” and defeated a 40-year incumbent and fellow Democrat in the

general election to become one of the youngest members of Congress.

On the GOP side Weld, who ran in the 2016 elections on the Libertarian ticket with Gary Johnson, was asked why he thought he could replace a sitting president and pointed out that there are 20 states where independent voters can cast ballots in the primaries.

Hogan, who has not ruled out a run, was recently asked by Judy Woodruff if he could change something about the system, what would it be?

His first response was open primaries “because in our state the largest growing group are independents, we have about 800,000 and they can’t vote in primaries.” Beyond the simple issue of enfranchisement, he noted the added benefit adding, “you wouldn’t have so much polarization in Congress and the legislatures.”

With regards to Schultz’s independent campaign, should he decide to pursue it, he would bypass the primary process altogether but would invariably be asked about whether the

major party primaries should be open to independents.

Independents will be asking these candidates — and all who enter the 2020 race — to lobby their respective parties to open the presidential primaries to independents. Undoubtedly, the road to the 2020 election will have many twists and turns. One essential feature independent voters will have their eyes on is whether we can become partners in American democracy — not just kingmakers for the two-party system.

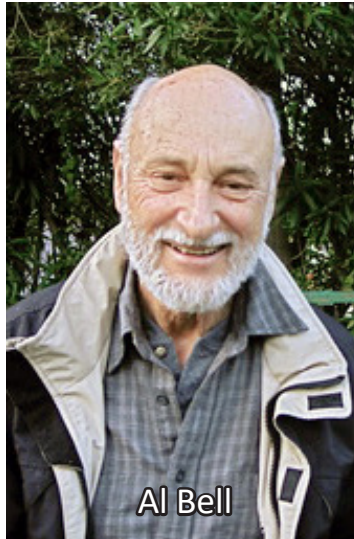
Sarah Lyons is director of communications at IndependentVoting.org, a national association of independents. She is a native of Oregon and lives in New York City.

“Independents have been determining the outcome of national elections since 2008 and were 30 percent of the electorate in the 2018 midterms.”

Everyone should have a vote in the presidential preference election

Al Bell - June 10th, 2019

In 2020, qualified independent voters who want to vote in the presidential preference election will be required to join a private organization, a “recognized party,” by February 19 to participate in the March 17 election. One-third of Arizona’s registered voters are independents. To be forced to join a party to vote for the president of all Americans violates the very idea of America. It is civic usury.



A pillar of our experiment is our right to vote, about which the Founders provided surprisingly little guidance. Voting arrangements were left to the states, though Congress retained the right to change them. Over time, political parties came to define how elections are conducted. The result is an Alice-in-Wonderland labyrinth of rules established by the parties that control participation in our elections. That has to end.

It must change – and can. That power rests with the parties themselves. They are private organizations that seek to influence government in specific ways, but they are not an arm of government. They do not own the Constitution; we – all of us – do.

Many Founding Fathers and historians considered America an experiment, based on the idea that people could govern themselves without a dominating force controlling them. It is the “Great American Experiment,” a radical and unprecedented form of self-governance. It will always be severely tested. Believing that only members of political parties should choose our leaders is an affront to all of us.

The history of voter control is convoluted and ugly. Voting rights have been opened up by constitutional amendment, then violated by local and state statutes. Parties blatantly seek to choose voters by tactics such as fostering gerrymandering, enacting arbitrary voting restrictions, operating campaign financing schemes, fomenting political action committees, and in general, playing games with our most basic right of citizenship. “Winning” through such devious means dishonors the principles that define America. It cynically treats our experiment as ill-founded and non-party voters as second-class citizens. It is the ultimate civic hypocrisy.

Partly because of these offenses, millions of independent voters in America have opted out of the

parties. Many political pundits and party leaders discount them as spoilers who are just disgruntled party “leaners.” It is much more complicated than that.

Some independents are clearly anti-party. Many do identify generally with party policy positions. They also readily cross the partisan divide when they believe it is warranted.

Most independent voters want to tamp down game-playing and ramp up problem-solving. They refuse to vote in strict compliance with party dogma. In that, they do not render themselves less of an American. Quite the contrary, in fact.

The parties should bring us their best candidates. Our job – all of us – is to decide if we agree, then vote accordingly. No entity has the right to stop us.

How, then, do we proceed?

The Democratic and Republican parties in Arizona could open the presidential preference election to the 1.26 million independent Arizonans with a flourish of the pen. That is what the Democratic Party did in Nebraska, California, Oklahoma and South Dakota. The Democratic Party in Florida initiated a similar measure now working through counties toward their fall convention (with 80 percent support in Miami-Dade County alone!).

Parties’ right to do so is clearly established by the U.S. Supreme Court, despite Arizona’s law to the contrary. It alleges to supersede party rules, a position the Supreme Court rejected 33 years ago!

Why does this matter?

I recently had an awakening by talking with dozens of students at a couple of local colleges. Well over half consider themselves independents. Here comes the future!

The stakes are immense. Officeholders spend untold hours of time, taxpayers invest many millions of dollars a year, festering problems that go begging for solutions, and many citizens despair of how our “Great American Experiment” is doing.

One-third of Arizona’s registered voters are independents. To be forced to join a party to vote for the president of all Americans violates the very idea of America. It is civic usury.

Can independent voters help rewrite that script? Yes. Our experiment needs all the friends it can get. Tell your party leaders – Democrat Felecia Rottellini and Republican Kelli Ward –that you expect better from them by opening up the presidential preference election now!

Just let voters vote. All of us.

Alfred Bell is a Peoria resident and is a leader in the independent voter movement in Arizona.

Independent voters silenced in Presidential Preference elections

By Guy Tiano and McKenzie Sadeghi

February 25, 2019

We are two of the 1.2 million independent registered voters in Arizona who pay taxes that fund the Arizona Presidential Preference election but are forbidden from participating in it unless we re-register.

This prohibition unnecessarily silences the voice of eager young voters. As eager young voters who recognize that our society is continuously changing, we find it difficult to entirely agree with the left or right side, which is why we take the utmost pride in being registered independent voters in the state of Arizona. Unfortunately, in Arizona, registered voters are only able to vote for their designated party in primary elections, creating an unfair system discriminating against registered independents.

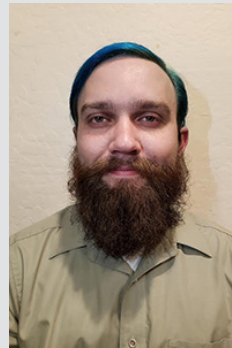
When it comes to the primary elections, our state is facing unjust barriers. Instead of being heard many voices are continuously silenced. Some argue in order to make sure their vote counts that one can change party affiliation. Some independents do switch party affiliation to vote in Presidential Preference elections; however, no voter should be forced into switching their political stance in order to have a voice heard in elections. In addition, many independent voters only learn about this prohibition a few weeks before the election and by then it's too late to change your party registration.

What kind of message do we send to young people energized to have their voice heard by a Presidential election, only to be told, sorry you can't participate?

How can we rectify this situation and create a fair voting system that better reflects the people of America? The answer is SB1057: a bill that would allow independents to vote in Presidential Preference elections.

This initiative is not the first time people have pushed for independents to have the ability to vote in primaries. In 2016, petitions signed by 30,848 registered independent voters were delivered asking the heads of the state Republican and Democratic parties to allow them to vote. In 2017, former Rep. Ken Clark introduced HB2350 to allow independents the ability to vote in primaries. Unfortunately, it was not put to a vote.

We urge that SB1057 receive legislative action, it is long overdue that we have the Presidential Preference election open to all voters in Arizona, just like our statewide primaries.



Guy Tiano is a veteran of the U.S. Army, a registered independent, and a junior at Arizona State University majoring in Public Service and Public Policy (Emergency Management and Homeland Security).



McKenzie Sadeghi is a registered independent, and a sophomore at Arizona State University majoring in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Although independents make up one-third of Arizona's registered voters, this group often goes unnoticed and unheard before and during Presidential Preference elections.

This growing young generation must not be underestimated. Everyone deserves the power to exercise their right to be heard.

Voting in this country is more than a passion or responsibility; it is a constitutional right that allows the people of America to change the future of our country. We must eliminate these unethical voting barriers that independent voters face. Whether it be college students like us or an elderly citizen, every voice deserves recognition, regardless of their political standpoint.

Let us all bring awareness to these underrepresented voices, and make our voting system better for ourselves and future generations to follow.

Independent voters deserve a voice. It all starts with SB1057.

Miami Democrats want to let independents vote in the party's primary elections

BY DAVID SMILEY

APRIL 19, 2019

The Miami-Dade Democratic Party wants independent voters to help select Democratic nominees for governor and Congress, and will push to completely change the way the state party holds primary elections.

The local party — representing the county with the most registered Democrats in Florida — announced Friday that it is launching a campaign to change the Florida Democratic Party's rules for primary elections. Currently, only Democrats can participate in Democratic primaries for local, state and federal races, and local leaders say they'll push their counterparts in Florida's other 66 counties to welcome independent voters into the August primaries.

"In order to win elections, we need to conduct outreach and make inroads with voters not affiliated with a party," Miami-Dade Democratic Party Chairman Steve Simeonidis said in a statement. "We need actions, not mere words and there is no stronger action than to welcome their voice in our primaries."

There are separate, ongoing efforts to change the primary elections statewide for all parties, including a petition drive pushed by some of Miami's biggest political boosters to amend the Florida Constitution, which includes a section laying out the rules for primary, general and special elections. But the effort by Miami-Dade Democrats is specific to the Florida Democratic Party, and local activists believe a change in party rules would be enough to alter the Democratic primary process.

Such a change would substantially alter the demographics of Democratic primary elections by widening the pool of voters and bringing in voters who are more likely to be moderate in their political leanings. It would also make primary campaigns more expensive, with more than 3 million no-party-affiliated voters throughout Florida suddenly able to participate.

A spokesman for the Florida Democratic Party did not immediately respond to a request for comment.





Aaron McKinney: Time for Florida Dems to embrace open primaries

“It’s time to stand up for independent voters and show them we value their involvement and participation.”

June 6, 2019

Thirty-seven percent of Florida voters are registered Democrats. That’s a steep drop from 54 percent in 1990.

Republican voter registration has also plummeted, from 41 percent 20 years ago to 35 percent today.

Where are all these voters going?

They’re not going anywhere. They’ve been right in front of our eyes the whole time.

They’re registered, they’re ready to vote but they don’t want to join a party. We are witnessing a historic shift in voter affiliation in Florida and across the country.

The numbers of independent (NPA) voters are exploding and are growing faster than either major political party. 27 percent of registered voters—3.6 million Floridians — are now independents. And they are shut

out of voting in Florida’s closed primary elections.

As an African American leader of the Florida Democratic Party, I believe we have two choices in how we relate to the growing ranks of independent voters, many of whom are people of color and young, like me.

We can cross our arms and say, “you must join our party if you want to vote,” or we can live up to our mission to be a party of inclusion, participation, diversity and progress, open the Democratic primaries, and build a new governing coalition for Florida.

I choose the latter. Open primaries.

If the Florida Democratic Party is going to continue its claim as the Party of inclusion, it’s time to stand up for independent voters and show them we value their involvement and participation. We have the legal authority to open our primary elections to independents.

The Supreme Court has ruled that political parties can supersede state election laws regarding who can and cannot participate in their nominating primaries. Unlike other election laws and statutes over which the parties have no control, the Florida Democratic Party could insist that unaffiliated independent voters be allowed to participate in our primary elections as early as 2020.

2020 will be a fiercely competitive primary election season with over 20 presidential contenders duking it out, but 3.6 million Floridians will be denied a say under the current rules.

The Florida Democratic Party has a golden opportunity to bring these voters into the conversation and into our vision for the future. It’s a once in a generation opportunity we cannot afford to squander.

Independents decide elections.

But since neither party reaches out to them until just before the general election, they swing back and forth between Democrat and Republican.

In 2008, Florida independents went for **Barack Obama**

52 to 45 percent. But in 2016, they preferred **Donald Trump** over **Hillary Clinton** by a margin of 47 to 42 percent. Two years later, they went for **Andrew Gillum** over **Ron DeSantis** 54 to 44 percent. And we should have done even better.

When Democrats lock millions of voters out of the primaries, it's a tossup as to whether they will vote for us in November. Closed primaries are unfair, but they are also preventing Democrats from building a lasting majority.

Pew Research has found that a majority of independent voters consistently lean toward progressive values and issues. Even among conservative independents, Pew found them to actually be aligned with Democrats on many key policy issues, from immigration reform to same-sex marriage.

It's not hard to understand why.

Younger Americans, including young voters of color, have the highest rates of political independence. 50 percent of millennial voters now identify as independents. Their turnout has nearly doubled since 2014, and for the first time, they cast more votes than baby boomers in the 2018 midterm elections.

These are natural Democratic Party allies, and they want to vote.

We risk losing an entire generation of open-minded voters if we don't embrace and respect their desire to identify and register as independents. They will vote for our candidates.

But not if they feel disrespected.

The media sometimes projects that independents are all "angry white men." That's not true.

Independents are as diverse as our state, and their numbers are growing in communities of color.

Too often, our party has gone to communities of color with a backward-looking message: "We have to defeat the Republicans, or you will lose what little you have."

It's an out-of-touch approach, indicative of flawed or

antiquated tactics. African American and Latino voters young and old are growing tired of this approach, and rightfully so.

Witness the 1.6 million African American voters who stayed home during the 2016 election, the first decline in turnout in over 20 years, and a Latino voter turnout that held steady from the previous election despite a significant voter registration effort.

We risk losing an entire generation of open-minded voters if we don't embrace and respect their desire to identify and register as independents. They will vote for our candidates.

But not if they feel disrespected.

Our party should be sending a clear message to all Floridians that the Democratic Party has a vision of progress, democracy and participation. And we don't just talk the talk, but we walk it like we talk it — shoutout to Gillum.

Bringing independent voters into the Democratic Party's nominating process brings us more in line with our own values and gives us a distinct advantage that will pay dividends in general elections for years to come.

The Miami-Dade Democratic Party just passed a resolution urging the Florida Democratic Party to open its primaries in 2020 and every election after.

Several other county parties have passed similar resolutions or are actively considering them. These resolutions will have a full hearing at our party's convention in October.

I hope every Florida Democrat will stand with me, support a move to open primaries, and build a new progressive future for Florida.



Aaron McKinney is a former State Senate political staffer and State Committeeman for the Miami-Dade Democratic Executive Committee.

Portland Press Herald

Our View: Maine should have open primaries

By The Editorial Board - May 13, 2019

Maine is a national leader when it comes to the way it runs its elections. Popular programs like same-day voter registration, Clean Elections public financing, ranked choice voting and a paper record of every vote that can be relied on in the event of a recount put our state in the forefront of making sure everyone has a chance to make their voice heard on Election Day.

As a result, Maine is a perennial leader in voter turnout – in November elections anyway. Primaries are another story.

There's a bill before the Legislature to do something about that. L.D. 211 would open primaries to voters who are not registered as members of a party, adding more voices to the mix when we choose nominees. Open primaries would require candidates to campaign to a broader swath of the electorate and could produce better choices for voters in November.

As a state that prides itself on political independence, and has long had more people register to vote without joining a party than belong to any party, this is a reform that is long overdue.

The current system of closed primaries is left over from an earlier time, when political parties were stronger organizations that were responsive to a politically diverse group of voters. Unenrolled voters are only allowed to vote in a Maine primary if they pretend to join a party for three months. It's a sham many voters find distasteful and a bureaucratic hurdle that effectively shuts out 40 percent of the electorate.

In 2018, both the Democrats and Republicans had hotly contested, multi-candidate races for governor. Between the two parties, about 280,000 people cast ballots, which represented about 27 percent turnout. A minority of the electorate got to choose the choices that everyone else would see on Election Day.

At least there were choices in November. In some elections, the primary offers the only choice or the only choice that matters. Voters who are shut out of the preliminary round often feel like they have no real choice in the general election and have to vote for the candidate they dislike the least, instead of expressing a preference for a candidate that they like the most.

Primary elections affect government too much to remain in monopoly control of parties that only represent a minority of voters. Maine should open these taxpayer-funded elections to all voters.

The RIVERDALE PRESS

EDITORIAL

Let the voters be heard

Posted July 13, 2019

Before the first vote was cast Queens borough president Melinda Katz was virtually crowned the next district attorney for Queens County.

Then there was an election, and surprise! Public defender Tiffany Cabán won by 1,000 votes. That is until absentee ballots were counted up, and once again, Katz seems to have earned the electoral prize.

While a court — and a manual recount — will ultimately decide this political tennis match, concerns have been raised about how elections are conducted much closer to home.

The biggest problem? New York remains a closed primary state. That means in order to vote in a Democratic primary, for example, you must be a Democrat. New York has eight recognized political parties, running the gamut from liberalism to conservatism.

A registered member of the Green Party? You can't vote Democratic in a primary. A registered Libertarian? Don't even think about casting a ballot in a GOP primary.

New York is just one of 11 states that require closed primaries, according to published reports. And at least in the Bronx (and many parts of New York City), if you win the Democratic nomination, you can start measuring the curtains in your soon-to-be new office.

Want to have a say earlier but not a member of the right party? You can change your affiliation, but it must be done six months in advance.

The legislature has passed a bill that would streamline the process to change party affiliation much earlier, but it has yet to even make it to Andrew Cuomo's desk.

Why does that make a difference? The Queens race had 2,800 provisional ballots cast, where more than 2,300 of them were tossed out, according to The New York Times. These likely were from people who were not properly registered to vote, or more likely, were simply not registered Democrats, hoping to get a voice between Cabán and Katz.

In a race that, as of last weekend, was down to a difference of just 16 votes, those ballots could have made a huge difference.

The idea of a closed primary was to allow parties to choose their representatives in a final head-to-head. That's great in places where party membership populations are more balanced, but terrible in areas like the Bronx where minority parties get no say.

It gives political machines the power they need to swing votes to the candidates of their choice, while ensuring there's minimal noise outside.

Elections aren't designed to be pre-determined, they're supposed to express the views of the people. And those people must be heard.

NJ needs open primaries

July 9th, 2019

Last month, 7.7% of New Jersey voters went to the polls to vote in party primaries that were, for the most part, noncompetitive. That was hailed as an increase from the 3% that voted four years ago.

Americans are deeply concerned about our country—just look at the level of volunteering and charitable giving in New Jersey and nationally. We care what happens. So why is voter participation so low? Not apathy. It's failed political system that lacks transparency, is divisive, controlled by party insiders and overly reliant on campaign contributions.

We represent the 2.4 million independent voters that were locked out of the primaries. There are more voters registered as unaffiliated in NJ than in either of the major political parties. It's hypocritical to bemoan participation rates when you exclude 40% of the registered voters in the state.

As leaders of New Jersey Independent Voters (Sue Davies) and No Labels New Jersey (Steve Barratt), we are advocating for the New Jersey Democratic and Republican Parties to Open the 2020 Presidential Primaries to all New Jersey independents.

Independents across our state want to participate in the presidential primary process without having to compromise their independence. Our tax dollars pay for these elections and we deserve to be heard. The parties have the opportunity to broaden the conversation and participation in 2020. It is time for a democracy experiment.

Steve Barratt, Long Valley
Sue Davies, Jersey City

Bill to move to open primary elections represents 'a promising day for independent voters across PA'

The Senate State Government Committee on Tuesday passed several bills seeking to modernize PA's election laws including one that would open up primary elections to unaffiliated voters.

By Jan Murphy -- June 18th 2019

Without question, election reform is in the air in Pennsylvania.

Legislation that would open up Pennsylvania's Republican and Democratic primary elections to unaffiliated voters won approval on Tuesday of the Senate State Government Committee, along with several other bills to make changes to the state's electoral process.

The changes are hoped will spur greater voter participation in the elections and are only part of a broader package of election-related bills the committee has considered or will consider in the fall, said committee Chairman Mike Folmer, R-Lebanon County.

Earlier this month, the House State Government Committee held a discussion that showed its interest in making some of the same changes to election law that the Senate committee approved to modernize the state's election laws that have not been substantially updated in more than 60 years.

Pennsylvania is one of only nine states that doesn't allow cross-over voting by members of other parties in its primary election, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The open primary legislation, sponsored Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, R-Jefferson County, would allow the state's 785,000 unaffiliated voters to have a voice in nominating Republican or Democratic candidates. It passed the committee by a 9-2 vote.

In his memo to his colleagues seeking their support, he attributed low primary voter turnout in part to "voters feeling disenfranchised by the extremes of both major parties, who have taken control of the primary process. Allowing more people the opportunity to have a voice in their representation is an important step toward enduring democracy."

Sen. Katie Muth, D-Montgomery County, indicated while supportive of open primaries, she intends to offer an amendment that would open them up to even more voters.

As it now stands, the bill would allow only unaffiliated voters to participate in primary elections. She would like to amend the bill to allow people who are registered to third parties such as

the Green Party or Libertarian to participate as well. Otherwise, she said it leaves out a large chunk of people who are forced to pay for the primary election without being able to participate in them.

Sens. Kristen Phillips-Hill, R-York County, and Pat Stefano, R-Fayette County, cast the dissenting votes. Hill said afterward that some of her constituents told her they weren't comfortable with the idea of allowing people of other parties to choose their party's candidate and "my job is to represent the people of the 28th" senatorial district.

Stefano said he opposed it because it would make primary campaigns more costly for candidates. "Running a general election campaign is expensive. Primaries are more focused because you know your audience. When you open that up to unaffiliated voters you don't know who they are," he said. "I don't know how to reach them. Do I have to reach out to all of them? It's just an added expense."

Government reform advocates applauded the open primary legislation advancing out of committee.

"This is a promising day for independent voters across Pennsylvania," said Jennifer Bullock, Director of Independent Pennsylvanians, as a grassroots advocacy group. "We've never had the opportunity to vote in what are often the decisive elections in our communities. Being forced to join a political party in order to have a voice in the electoral process is absurd and unfair. We're grateful that Senator Scarnati has taken up this cause and especially pleased to see both Democratic and Republican members of the State Senate Government Committee supporting the issue."

Ray Murphy, state coordinator for Keystone Votes, a nonpartisan coalition of 41 organizations working to update the state's election laws, said, "The actions being taken now represent some of the most significant steps in 60 years. Let's keep the momentum going so we can get it done in time for 2020, lest we're forced to wait another generation for change."

Other bills that won the Senate committee's approval include ones that would allow no-excuse absentee voting, which is permitted in 27 other states; eliminate straight-ticket party voting, which is only allowed in seven other states; clarify the number of ballots that a county would have to print; establish the Pennsylvania Election Law Advisory Board; and rotate the ballot positions of candidates seeking certain Philadelphia elective offices.

These two party bosses used to oppose open primaries. Now, they're all in

By **Elizabeth Hardison** — May 1, 2019

Alan Novak spent eight years as the chairman of Pennsylvania's Republican Party, trying to secure votes for GOP candidates across the state.

During that time, Novak said, his party "didn't think much about independent" voters. And as a party boss, he didn't think that voters should participate in primary elections unless they registered as Democrats or Republicans.

T.J. Rooney, a former chair of the state Democratic Party, said the same thing at a Senate committee hearing Tuesday, where lawmakers considered a suite of election reform measures, including a bill that would open Pennsylvania's closed primaries to independent voters.

Rooney and Novak both told senators they probably would have opposed the proposal when they were party bosses.

But now that they're not in charge of collecting votes, they support it. Both men said Tuesday that open primaries would encourage more Pennsylvanians to vote and lead to more competitive elections.

"If I'd uttered these words 10 years ago, my pants would have caught on fire and my tongue would have fallen out of my head," Rooney said. "But it's true — this is not working. These initiatives to bring more people in and include them are clearly the right way to go."

Current election law prohibits independent voters in Pennsylvania from participating in party primaries, where Democrats and Republicans winnow down their party's field of candidates ahead of a general election.

But a bill sponsored by Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, R-Jefferson, would allow independent voters to cast ballots for one party on a primary election day. Registered Republicans and Democrats would continue to vote for candidates in their own party.

The purpose of the closed primary is to ensure that only dedicated, registered voters have a say in their party's nomination process. But critics say it disenfranchises voters who choose not to identify as Democrats or Republicans.

Sen. Lisa Boscola, D-Northampton, said closed primaries need to change as more and more Pennsylvanians register as independents. She said Pennsylvania's current policy is particularly problematic in local elections, such as school board races, where candidates may cross-file with both parties to get on the ballot.

Sen. Anthony Williams, D-Philadelphia, also pointed out that some areas have one-party control of local and county offices. A city such as Harrisburg or Philadelphia may only have Democrats running in municipal races, even in primaries. That means that Republican voters don't have a say in who runs their city, said Williams, who is a Democratic candidate for mayor this year.



T.J. Rooney, Alan Novak and acting secretary of state Kathy Boockvar testify before a senate committee.

Given the rise of independent voter registration in the past decade, good government groups and election reform advocates say that Pennsylvania risks disenfranchising more of its citizens if it doesn't open primaries to unaffiliated voters.

Pennsylvania is now home to 786,000 registered independent voters, according to the Department of State. Their ranks have more than doubled in the last ten years, making them the fastest-growing voter group in the state, according to Jeremy Gruber, senior vice president of the nonprofit advocacy group Open Primaries.

Gruber told the Senate committee that half of all millennials in the U.S., including more than a third of black and Hispanic millennials, consider themselves independents. Half of the veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are also independent voters, he said.

If independent voter registration continues to keep pace with past trends, barring such voters from state primary elections is "simply unsustainable," Gruber said.

Novak also pointed out that independent voters already have a substantial role in general elections.

In his native Chester County, for instance, 42 percent of voters are registered Republicans, 39 percent are registered Democrats, according to Department of State data.

The remaining 20 percent are unaffiliated or registered with third parties. Those voters can sway a tight general election, but they have no say in who's on the ballot if they're barred from primary elections.

Novak thinks that the state would have stronger political parties and more competitive races if independent voters could cast votes earlier in the election process.

"I think candidates and parties will be better the sooner they have to focus their message and their outreach to a general election audience," Novak said. "It'll make [candidates] better and it'll make the process better."



PRIVILEGED ATTORNEY CLIENT COMMUNICATION

To: Cathy L. Stewart, Vice President for National Development at Independent Voting
From: Harry Kresky, Esq.
Date: May 7, 2019

This is in response to your request for the legal authority that gives political parties the right to include non-aligned voters in their primaries.

The seminal case, of course, is *Tashjian v. Republican Party*, 479 U.S. 208, 107 S. Ct. 544 (1986) where the U.S. Supreme Court held that the Republican Party of Connecticut could open its primaries to unaffiliated voters, the State's election law mandating closed primaries notwithstanding.

Two subsequent cases affirmed this right, one in New York and one in Alaska. In *State Comm. of the Indep. Party v. Berman*, 294 F. Supp. 2d 518 (S.D.N.Y. 2003) the federal district court upheld the right of the New York Independence Party to open its primaries to unaffiliated voters, the New York Election Law notwithstanding. In *State v. Alaska Democratic Party*, 426 P.3d 901 (Alaska 2018) the Alaska Supreme Court made a similar ruling.

In New York and Alaska, the parties first adopted a rule opening their primaries and then petitioned their respective States' election authorities to conduct the parties' primary elections so that unaffiliated voters could participate. When election officials refused to comply, the parties went to court and won an order directing the election authorities to comply with the parties' demand.



Miami-Dade Democratic Party passes resolution in support of allowing non-party affiliated, registered voters to participate in Democratic Party primaries

POSTED BY MIAMI-DADE DEMOCRATIC PARTY | APRIL 08, 2019

RESOLUTION OF THE MIAMI-DADE DEMOCRATIC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO MAXIMIZE VOTER PARTICIPATION AND PARTY GROWTH BY CHANGING THE RULE FOR ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE IN THE PARTY PRIMARIES

Passed by the Issues Committee on February 21, 2019
Passed by the Steering Committee on April 1st, 2019
Passed by the Steering Committee on April 8th, 2019

WHEREAS, the Unity Reform Commission of the Democratic National Committee (“DNC”) including Chairman Tom Perez and the Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton campaigns, issued its report stating that “it is critical that all eligible persons participate in the electoral process, including the Democratic presidential nominating process”, and that “the party process be improved to ensure maximum participation and Party growth”, and

WHEREAS, the Commission strongly praised the 30 jurisdictions which allowed non-party affiliated, registered voters to participate in Democratic Party primaries, and strongly “favor(ed) same-day and automatic voter registration, which includes same-day party switching”, and

WHEREAS, the Commission recommended that the DNC and the Party at all levels SHALL (emphasis added) use all means necessary such as encouraging states to pursue litigation, legislation, and “changing Party rules” to ensure that the above goals be achieved, and

WHEREAS, the Democratic Party stands for inclusion, participation, diversity and progress to the extent that the electoral selection process should fully reflect those values, and

WHEREAS, there are nearly 3.6 million non-party affiliated, registered voters in Florida where 27% of the total registered are not eligible to participate in the Democratic Primary, and the average primary turnout of about 23% is one of the lowest in the country. Demographic studies of this non-party affiliated, registered group of voters show them to be disproportionately composed of the young, students, people of color, and the newly-registered. Many other state Democratic Parties, including California, have opened up their primaries to non-party affiliated, registered voters which now comprises 40+% of the plurality of voters in the nation, and

WHEREAS 73% of Florida Democratic Party members polled support (*1) open primaries, and Florida’s non-party affiliated, registered voters were a key determinant in the past three presidential elections. The Party should be sending a clear message that it values their participation, and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled (*2) that political parties have an absolute First Amendment right to decide who can and can’t participate in their primary election, including non-party affiliated, registered voters, and that assertion does not require new legislation to be authorized.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, THAT THE MIAMI-DADE DEMOCRATIC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HEREBY AGREES THAT THE FLORIDA DEMOCRATIC PARTY SHOULD CHANGE ITS RULES TO ALLOW ALL NON-PARTY AFFILIATED, REGISTERED VOTERS TO VOTE IN THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES NOW SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 17th, 2020, THE DEMOCRATIC STATE PRIMARY FOR STATEWIDE OFFICES NOW SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 25th, 2020, AND ALL SUBSEQUENT PRIMARIES.

*1 https://www.openprimaries.org/fl_poll_2019

*2 Tashjian v. Republican Party, 479 U.S. 208 (1986).

A Letter to Terrie Rizzo and Joe Gruters

We write to you as the Democratic and Republican Party Chairs, respectively, of our state.

We, the undersigned, are Florida voters concerned about the process in which our presidential primary election will be held in 2020. The election of the next President of the United States is the most important exercise of democracy in our nation.

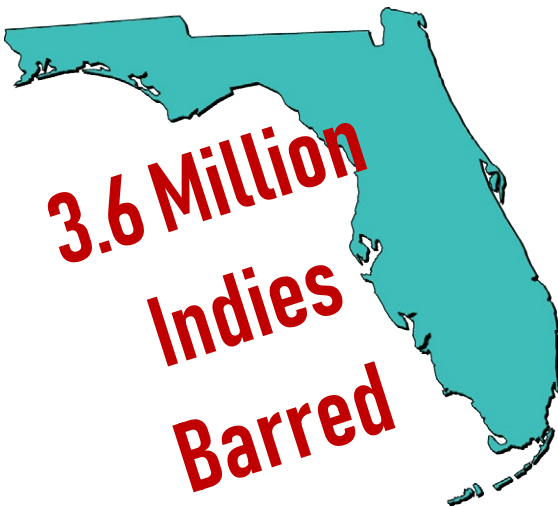
In a national survey of independent voters (including over 240 independents from Florida) conducted by Independent Voting in 2018, 87.3% of independents think the Democratic and Republican parties should open the presidential primaries to allow independents to participate.

There are 3.6 million Floridians registered with no party affiliation. That is 26.8% of Florida's voters. In a third of our congressional districts, independents are the second largest grouping of voters. 39% of Latinos and 31% of African Americans in Florida identify as independent. It is our strong belief that no Florida voter should be forced to join a political party in order to be able to vote in the presidential primaries.

In many states around the country, independents are welcomed into the presidential primary process.

We write today to request that you open the Democratic and Republican presidential primaries in Florida to the fastest growing community of voters in our state — independents.

You have the authority to do so. You can act to realize the full democratic participation of all Floridians.



NAME		ADDRESS	PHONE	EMAIL	DATE
1	Print				
	Sign				
2	Print				
	Sign				
3	Print				
	Sign				
4	Print				
	Sign				
5	Print				
	Sign				

EYES ON 2020 CABINET

The EYES ON 2020 National Cabinet coordinated the campaign across the country.



Al Bell

Al Bell is retired from a 47-year career in urban planning, after serving four years as a Navy seaplane pilot. A native Californian, he moved to Arizona in 2007, when he became a registered Independent, and has been active in that movement for the last several years.



David Belmont

David Belmont is a multi-media artist, community organizer, and long-time political reform activist. He was Ballot Access Coordinator for Dr. Lenora Fulani's 1988 presidential campaign and is currently a researcher for Independent Voting.



Jenn Bullock

Jennifer Bullock, M.Ed., M.L.S.P., LPC is a long-time community activist, youth advocate and psychotherapist. She is founder of Independent Pennsylvanians, a grassroots activist association working to strengthen the influence of independents, and is the Pennsylvania affiliate of Independent Voting.



Tim Castro

Tim Castro, an Arizona native, has managed several local campaigns, including Adrian Fontes' victory for Maricopa County Recorder; the first Latino elected to a county wide seat. Tim joined the Independent Voting movement in their first foray in Arizona through the Open Primaries Initiative. Tim remains committed to ensuring everyone's voice is heard.



David Cherry

David Cherry is the City Leader of the All Stars Project of Chicago. For more than 25 years, Cherry, a seasoned community organizer and activist, has helped diverse communities develop around issues of democracy, social justice and inclusion. He is the founder of United Independents of Illinois.



Tiani Coleman

Tiani X. Coleman is President of New Hampshire Independent Voters. She's an attorney who became an independent voter and activist, after witnessing first-hand the failure of our two-party system, first serving as the Chair of the Salt Lake County Republican Party, and later as the campaign manager for a Democratic Congressional candidate.



Sue Davies

Sue Davies, founder of New Jersey Independent Voters, has been an independent activist since 1986. In 1988, she was part of the team of activists that put African American leader Dr. Lenora Fulani on the ballot as an independent in all 50 states.



David Ellis

David Ellis is an archaeologist working in the Pacific northwest. He's been active in the independent movement for over 20 years, especially in his home state of Oregon.



Jessie Fields

Dr. Jessie Fields is a Harlem physician and Board member of Independent Voting and Open Primaries. She has been active as a spokesperson and leader in building the independent and reform movements for the last 30 years.



Dennis Flaherty

With 30 years of active duty and 14 years in state government, this registered Independent cannot vote in Arizona's presidential preference elections. That's unacceptable and we will change it.



Randy Fricke

Randy Fricke is a long-time renewable energy advocate and environmental activist in Colorado, where he ran for Congress in 2004. Randy founded Western Colorado Independent Voters in 2018. Randy is on the presidential outreach committee for the EYES ON 2020 National Cabinet and serves on Independent Voting's Election Reform Committee. He and his family have lived in Colorado for 25 years.



Kirsten Fulda

Kirsten Fulda, a resident of New Haven, CT, has been an independent activist since 2003. She is a long-time community organizer and leader in the arena of youth development, and is committed to reforming our electoral process and empowering not just independents, but all voters.



Wayne Griffin

Wayne Griffin, state chair of the South Carolina Independence Party, has been involved in independent politics for over 20 years. He has been an elected City Councilperson in Greer County where he owns an insurance agency.



Steve Hough

As a lifelong independent, Steve became politically active after retiring as an accountant in 2012. He joined Independent Voting and Florida Fair and Open Primaries (FFAOP) shortly thereafter and assumed leadership of FFAOP in 2017.



Sarah Lyons

Sarah Lyons is Director of Communications at Independent Voting. Since 1995, she has played a leading role in making Independent Voting recognized as the premier advocacy center for independent voters. Lyons leads Independent Voting's monthly Spokesperson Training Program.



Gwen Mandell

Gwen Mandell is Director of National Outreach at Independent Voting and recently convened welcome committee of dedicated activists who reach out to the many independents who sign up to learn more about Independent Voting. She is the editor of The Hub, Independent Voting's online newsletter, and chief organizer of Jackie Salit's national conference call, the largest of its kind in the country.



Carl McCluster

Reverend McCluster serves in his 25th year as the Senior Pastor & Teacher of Shiloh Baptist Church in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He is the Founder of Faith Community Development Corporation, the faith-based community development corporation chartered by Shiloh Baptist Church and the Founder & Managing Director for FREEDOM (Faith Restoration Empowerment & Economic Development Outreach Ministries, Inc.), a national consulting firm.



Randy Miller

Randy Miller is a land surveyor, an Army veteran, and the President/founder of the Utah League of Independent Voters. He draws political cartoons lampooning political parties for therapy from a too party system.



Steve Richardson

Steve Richardson declared his voting independence in 1992 by casting a vote for Ross Perot, went on to become a founding member of United We Stand America's chapter in Wyoming, fought for term limits and even ran for Congress as a Libertarian in 1998 before moving to Virginia the next year. He joined Independent Voting in 2005 and co-founded Virginia Independent Voters Association in 2011.



Rick Robol

Rick Robol, a writer, attorney and decorated veteran, resides in Columbus, Ohio. He is a member of Independent Voting's National Electoral Reform Committee.



Dona Sauerburger

Dona Sauerburger, who heads up Independent Voters of Maryland, is a certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. She first became active in the independent movement in 2013. She serves on the League of Women Voters of Maryland Primary Election Committee, where she has advocated and won the support of the League for opening the primaries in Maryland.



Cathy Stewart

Cathy Stewart is the Vice President for National Development at Independent Voting and has been a community organizer and activist in the independent movement since the 1980s. She is the founder and host of the popular Politics for the People Book Club and Campaign Manager for EYES ON 2020.



Randy Wilson

Randy Wilson is a life performance coach in San Francisco and is an activist with Independent Voting and Independent Voice in California, where he worked on the initiative to pass nonpartisan top two elections in California.



Kim Wright

Kim Wright is a social worker who became active in independent politics in 2004. She ran unsuccessfully for a state senate seat in 2006. Kim has organized independent voters, worked on political reforms and supported various campaigns in Kansas, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Arizona. She lives in Missouri and continues her self-proclaimed mission toward fair and inclusive rights for independent voters.



EYES ON



 **ndependentvoting.org**