

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)



April 13, 2021

2021 Spokesperson Training Kicks Off, Independents Say: "I'm An Independent and I'm Here!"

The political parties and the media like to fuel the fire of division. They insist that voters stick within a set of boxes (we are either Democrat or Republican, Liberal or Conservative, this or that). Many Americans are rejecting these labels and choose to be independents. It's in this situation that 20 independents from 16 states came together on Zoom for Independent Voting's first spokesperson training of the year on March 22.

The aim of the spokesperson training program is simple: To help independents create visibility for the fastest growing group of voters in the country by learning to talk about our own journeys and our own vision for a new kind of politics.

The two-hour training (part education, part performance training) consists of a powerpoint presentation about the size, scale and history of the community of independent voters and the myths that the media, the political scientists and the parties perpetuate about us. Participants then have an opportunity to ask questions and dialogue with Independent

Voting's president, Jackie Salit. Finally, there's a special performance training in telling your story. This session was led by Cathy Salit, Chief Organizer of the Global Play Brigade, and Maureen Kelly, President of Performance of a Lifetime, two top-level performance trainers and activists, both longtime independents themselves. These workshops were eye-opening and fun!

In answer to a question about the role independents can play in building more power and influence, Jackie Salit responded:

"Independents have to take it upon ourselves to help the entire country remember that this country belongs to the American people. It doesn't belong to any political party, or the winner of any election in any cycle...Our country needs to be reminded who we are and the road we're on. Independents are the people in this country who can make that statement and help our fellow Americans to reclaim that."



(From Top Left - Jackie Salit, Gwen Mandell, Cathy Salit, Maureen Kelly, Mike Pierson (California), Jeff Wattier (Arizona), Amikka Burl (Michigan), Kim Tremel (Iowa), Will Rawn (Montana), Jarell Corley (Illinois), David Heisley (Arizona), Mary Fridley (New York), Caroline Donnola (New York), Madisyn Stogsdill (Kansas), Sheryl Williams (New York), Jeanette Schultz (Ohio), Debbie Hollis (Louisiana), Jose Torres (Florida), Shari Cravens (California), Jackie Fuller (Virginia), Robin Nelson (North Carolina), Susan Sommer (Vermont), Katie Fahey (Michigan), Mike Marthaller (Washington), Javier Luque (New Jersey))

Said Jeff Wattier from Arizona: "The best part was having the opportunity to practice speaking to an audience about being an independent. There was instant feedback from the trainer, and from the other people in the workshop as well. Listening to the perspective each person had was also invaluable. Everyone had their own audience they wanted to speak with, and each of us spoke from our own experience/perspective."

The training culminated in a round-robin where each trainee shared 14 words (which included "I'm an independent because...") in a statement to the entire group. **You can view the clip of that section here .**

Afterwards, a number of activists shared their vision and plans for the future. Said Kim Tremel of Iowa: "My vision would be to continue to talk to people I know about the significance of being an independent and how partisan politics is detrimental to our country." Several participants are looking into political reform efforts they can join in their states. Some are reaching out to other independents to interview them (read Mary Fridley's profile of fellow spokesperson trainee, Amikka Burl below). Some are pursuing local podcasts. Some are writing letters to the editor of local publications or to the newsletters of organizations they belong to. One trainee said she wanted to write Larry Sabato (University of Virginia political scientist who continues to spread the myth that independents don't exist). Her message to him will be simple: "Here I am."

Spokesperson Training Testimonials - here's a few reasons to take the training.



"As more of us depart from the camps that the main parties have defined, we independents need to develop our own voices to be able to explain to others with clarity who we are and why we do not conform."

Mike Pierson
Leggett, California



"You are not alone in believing the two-party system has failed our democracy. Join other independents and become encouraged by the work of IndependentVoting.org and the workshop participants. You will be inspired to help reinvigorate our democracy by creating a political system that can actually get work done on behalf of all Americans."

Susan Sommer
Weston, Vermont



"We as independents need to learn how to take a stand against those who doubt us and belittle us. This experience helps prepare unaffiliated voters to make their case in a manner that's professional and persuasive. The vision is simple. We exist, we are the face of political homelessness as well as a true power in the political spectrum."

Javier Luque
Hasbrouck, New Jersey

Want to sign up for the next Spokesperson Training?

Independent Voting's Spokesperson Trainings will be conducted three more times this year for independents who want to develop their voices and help to make themselves and the independent community more visible.

Whether you want to learn how to talk to others about why you are independent or talk to the media, the pundits or the political science



SPOKESPERSON TRAINING

establishment about the significance of the rise of independent voters, this training is a great place to start.

Registration will be limited to assure that everyone has an opportunity to participate.

If you'd like to apply for an upcoming training, [fill out and submit this application today](#).

The Parties vs. the People: Former Congressman Speaks Out

Open Primaries hosted a very engaging zoom discussion yesterday, [Are the Political Parties Too Weak, Too Strong or...Obsolete?](#) with special guest former Oklahoma Congressman Mickey Edwards. Edwards is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and former Vice President of the Aspen Institute. He is also a political innovator and a godfather of the modern reform movement, best known for his thought-provoking book *The Parties Versus the People: How to Turn Republicans and Democrats into Americans*.



[Click the link above to view the full conversation](#)

In response to a question from John Opdycke, President of Open Primaries and moderator of the event, Edwards said, "I'm an independent...Sure I may lean in one direction or another, but when candidates come, you measure them against each other. You measure their views and their qualifications and that is an indication of independent action. It doesn't mean that in order to be an independent you shut off all views about everything...I am probably more inclined to favor people in one direction or another – it could be a Democrat, could be a Republican, but that doesn't in any way negate the idea that the problem is the way the parties control things, and there are a growing number of

people who are rebelling against the system...Independent simply means, I am not locked into your menu."

Unbound and Undeterred: Being Young and Independent



(Top Row, L to R: Devon Martinez, Julia Hemsworth, Ron Dumas
Bottom Row, L to R: Darius Holt, Madisyn Stogsdill , Javier Luque)

On Wednesday, March 31, the Youth Organizing Committee at Independent Voting hosted *Unbound and Undeterred: Being a Young Independent*, a Zoom event focused on the experience of young independent voters.

Independent Voting's Youth Outreach Coordinator Julia Hemsworth emphasized that the discussion was much more about the process and culture of American politics than a laundry list of traditional issues.

For example, when asked "When you have conversations about politics, what do you say that you feel isn't being heard?" Madisyn Stogsdill of Kansas responded "...the fact that you can learn so much from other perspectives regardless of their affiliation, especially coming from all of us independents. People often hear we affiliate ourselves with that identity and they just close out of the conversation. They already think 'Oh, I know what you stand for. You're undecided, you're this and you're that, and I can't learn anything new from you because I know everything already.' And in politics, you're constantly growing, so it's really important to breach past that barrier."

After viewing a slide on local efforts for election reform, the conversation homed in on the topic of Amendment 3, the nonpartisans initiative for open primaries that was on the ballot in Florida last November. Despite Amendment 3 falling just short of passing, people were excited to talk about the future of the independent movement.

"I feel as though we should not be discouraged by the tactics that the Republicans and Democrats are doing in Florida, or any other state..." said Darius Holt of Maryland. "I think in this time and age, particularly for millennials and for other young generations, there is a

great opportunity to galvanize independent voters to have a significant voice and actually make a significant difference in the political system....beyond Republican and Democrat.”

Would you like to be part of the next conversation? If you are 32 or under and consider yourself independent, reach out to Julia Hemsworth for more information at jhemsworth@independentvoting.org.

Prior to the meeting, Hemsworth wrote a letter to the editor announcing its date. Her local publication responded by writing a piece about the meeting and her efforts. Read **Staten Island Woman, 24, Hopes to Educate Young People on Independent Voting** . (*Staten Island Advance*)

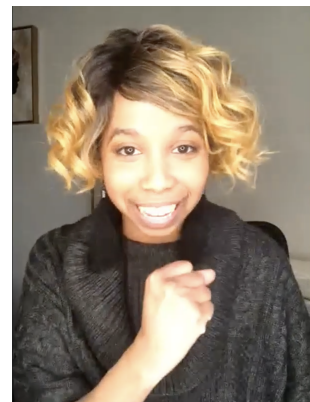
Committee members Julia Hemsworth (New York), Ron Dumas (North Carolina) and Devon Martinez (Colorado) had their joint **Letter to the Editor** printed in the *Independent Voter Network* . (*IVN*)

Profiles in Independence

Amikka Burl • Brownstown, Michigan

This profile was written by Mary Fridley, who interviewed Amikka, after they both completed Independent Voting's Spokesperson Training.

Though Amikka Burl grew up in a family of “extremely liberal” Democrats, this daughter of Detroit has always been different when it comes to her political choices. “I’ve never been a party line person,” Burl explains. “It’s not about voting for the party; it’s about voting for the policies and processes that will benefit our friends and families, our country.” She was first introduced to the independent movement as an undergraduate in mass communication at Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, NC. While at nearby UNC-Greensboro, she heard about a campus meeting at which Dr. Omar Ali, long-time independent leader and author of *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-party Movements* in the United States, was speaking.



Amikka Burl

After receiving a Master of Science degree in Journalism at Columbia University in New York City, Burl moved back to Greensboro. She continued working with Dr. Ali, met



Mary Fridley

independentvoting.org , and attended one of Independent Voting's national conferences.

Now back in Michigan, Burl runs LA-Ink Publishing, a media consulting company. She has emerged as a passionate spokesperson for independents, most recently as part of a panel of Michigan voters hosted by MSNBC's Ali Velshi during the weeks leading up to the 2020 presidential election.

The Primary Problem



Unite America recently released a report entitled The Primary Problem:

How Partisan Primaries Disenfranchise Voters, Distort Representation, and Fuel Political Division.

The report makes the case that partisan primaries are the “primary problem” in our politics today; that they disenfranchise voters, distort representation, fuel political division and dysfunction and that nonpartisan primaries can solve the primary problem.

Nick Troiano, Executive Director of Unite America and an independent himself writes in [The Atlantic](https://www.theatlantic.com) that solving partisanship in America begins with adopting nonpartisan primaries:

“Partisan primaries motivate legislators to keep in lockstep with a narrow and extreme slice of the electorate rather than govern in the public interest—a dynamic that has now come to threaten democracy itself.”



Nick Troiano

Fighting the Unholy Bipartisan Alliance in Louisiana

Shreveport, Louisiana independent and activist Debbie Hollis and Jeremy Gruber, Senior Vice President for Open Primaries, coauthored an editorial that appeared in *The Fulcrum* entitled **How an Unholy Bipartisan Alliance would**



Debbie Hollis



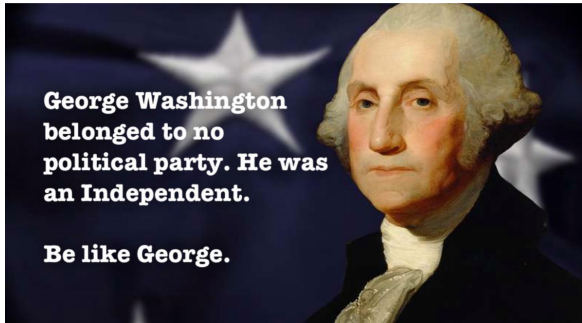
Jeremy Gruber

Disenfranchise many Black Louisianans

.

The editorial reports on an effort underway by leaders in both parties to close Louisiana's primaries. This, say Gruber and Hollis, "would be terrible for candidates and worse for voters. And it would be disastrous for African-Americans, more than 200,000 of whom are registered to vote as independents in the state."

Independents Roots Spread in New Hampshire



In New Hampshire, an independent Facebook group, Independent Voters of Amherst & Mont Vernon was recently started by Jim Manning. Within a week, it had more than 50 members. The group is "a coalition of 'unaffiliated' voters and independent thinkers who have grave concerns about the

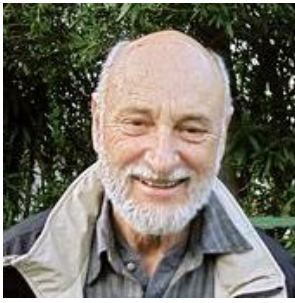
Democrat and Republican duopoly." Their motto is: "Be Like George." ("George Washington belonged to no political party. He was an independent. Be like George.") Posts have included references to Jackie Salit, Katherine Gehl, and other independent leaders, urging that we change our current party-centric system of electing candidates.

Tiani Coleman, President of New Hampshire Independent Voters, and an Amherst resident, was thrilled when she got the invite to join the group. She says, "When Peter White and I first mapped out our vision for New Hampshire Independent Voters, we envisioned each town developing a town group of independent voters. But finding people in each town isn't always easy. It can't be done from the top down. To see this group created so organically and flourishing so quickly, in my own town, has been exciting, to say the least. I hope people everywhere can catch the vision of how much more productive these conversations are when they're had and shared among friends and neighbors. Real movements grow from the ground up. Start your own town group today!"

Improv and Democracy - An Independent Take

On March 27, several members of the Independent Voting Network attended a workshop sponsored by the East Side Institute (a n international center for the study of social therapeutics and performance activism) called "Improv and Democracy."

Don Waisanen and Marian Rich led the workshop. Building on workshop leaders Don Waisanen's new book *Improv for Democracy: How to Bridge Differences and Develop the*



Al Bell

Communication and Leadership Skills Our World Needs (SUNY Press, 2021) and Marian Rich and Carrie Lobman's "Playing Around with Changing the World" (a chapter in *Applied Improvisation*, Bloomsbury, in press), the workshop explored how humor, improvisation and play are essential tools in the creation of a new movement for radical democracy.

Al Bell, Independents for Arizona activist, was one of the participants in the workshop and shared his thoughts on participating.

Improv/Evolve. That's one of the many things I learned a few days ago: how *improv* (improvisation) can help us *evolve* into better outcomes. Instead of the chaos of conflict based on fixed agendas, unscripted dialogues can take us toward a more constructive collaboration of ideas. The process enables us to be and to become seamlessly, evading the death spiral of rigid positions seeking to overwhelm each other. Evolve and build, not devolve and destroy.

Out of a little reading and three hours with Marian Rich and Don Waisanen, the three-hour long East Side Institute zoom seminar delivered that and nineteen more observations that I believe will enable me to become a more effective proponent of independent voting rights. That's quite a return on investment!

The technique fits beautifully with the independent voter orientation, which rejects rigid party control over what voters are supposed to think. Applied more broadly to politically powered institutions, this could replace the ubiquitous control mentality with one called governance. Now, wouldn't that be something!

"Bravo, Don and Marian! And thank you."

Don and Marian will host "Improv & Democracy: Making it Hard to Hate" on May 19. If you'd like to join the free workshop, you can [register here](#).

In the News

Katherine Gehl, former CEO and co-author of "The Politics Industry: How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy," wrote an editorial in March saying " **It's Time to Get Rid of Party Primaries.** " (*CNN*)

Top level African American CEOs are now saying something independents have been pushing for years: you cannot have a healthy economy without a healthy democracy. Read " **Black CEOs Urge Firms to Oppose Restrictive Voting Laws.** " (*CNBC*)

Columnist and independent Frank Fear asks the question: "[Could David Jolly Change the Landscape of Florida's Politics?](#)" about Jolly's possible independent candidacy for Governor in Florida. (*LA Progressive*)

A semi-open primary bill, LD 231, sponsored by State Senator Chloe Maxim is making its way through the legislature in Maine. Read Sen Maxim's editorial, "[Building An Inclusive Democracy Starts with Semi-Open Primaries](#)," on why Maine voters need and want open primaries. (*Bangor Daily News*)

And in his Letter to the Editor, Joe Pickering, co-founder of Mainers for Open Elections, shares why he is also supporting LD 1121, a bill Sen. Joe Baldacci introduced, which would create nonpartisan top-two primaries. Said Pickering: "I think Senator Maxmin is attempting to end the closed primaries in Maine, which is positive. But it falls far short of what is needed. I call the Closed Primary a darkened room. The bill is like a flash light in that darkened room when what Maine needs is a true open primary to put on the light switch." [Read Pickering's letter here](#) . (*Portland Press Herald*)

Read Western Colorado Independents leader Randy Fricke's Letter to the Editor, "[Redistricting Takes a Partisan Twist Away from Independence](#) ." (*Denver Post*)

Read "[Independent Voters Aren't Just Growing; They're Changing American Politics](#)," by John Opdycke and Jeremy Gruber of Open Primaries. (*Independent Voter Network*)

Gwen Mandell
Director of National Outreach
IndependentVoting.org
800-288-3201

gmandell@independentvoting.org

Make a Donation!

Give us a call today!

