



*June 15, 2021*

## New News is Good News: How the News about Independent Voters is Taking a Turn



Independent Voting has worked for 25 years to insist that independent voters be recognized as a true force, a force that can drive politics away from partisanship. Enlightened voices in the media are starting to report on this story -- that there is an enduring change in the American body politic -- and have opened their eyes to the fact that the rise of the independent voter is not a fluke, but a desire for a new politic in America.

In "**Independents Exercise Increasing Control Over Democratic, Republican Candidates**," *U.S. News & World Report* columnist Susan Milligan noted that "independent voters are having a moment. And it appears the moment is something enduring, as they gain increasing control over the fates of Democrats and Republicans." Milligan interviews Independent Voting President Jackie Salit, Dr. Omar Ali, professor of history and dean of Lloyd International Honors College, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, who serves on Independent Voting's national board, and Open Primaries' President John Opdycke.

Robert Robb of the *Arizona Republic* asks "**Why Do we Keep Voting for these Yo-Yos?**". Speaking about the prospect of a top-two non-partisan primary system, he says: "Arizona is ripe for such a reform. Independents are already a third of registered voters. Since the last election, both political parties have lost registrants while the number of independents has increased."

In "**Nine in 20 of us identify as independents. So how can we be polarized?**" David Anderson of *The Fulcrum* asserts: "Nine out of every 20 adults do not profess to be either a Democrat or a Republican. This fact cannot be reconciled with the assertion the electorate is polarized, no matter how much you crunch data in an effort to prove otherwise."

And finally, the *Washington Post* provides evidence that the call for open primaries and a level playing field for all voters is making headway among politicians - witness this editorial written by former Democratic Party and Republican Party chairs in Pennsylvania, Alan Novak and T.J. Rooney: "**Want to help resolve American political dysfunction? Allow open primary elections** ." They say : " Keeping primaries closed for the growing segment of the population that has not registered with a party is one of the few issues both parties seem to agree on."

The question of how the country deals with many Americans' growing discontent with the parties and specifically the trend towards independence is ripe. Jackie Salit says: "Why deny the reality of independent voters? Why not listen to what we say, what we yearn for, and why we feel the parties have corrupted American democracy? You can't define us out of existence. There are just too many of us now."

## Spokesperson Training II - Telling the Independent Story



(From Top Left - Gwen Mandell, Jackie Salit, Maureen Kelly (trainer), Cathy Salit (trainer), Amikka Burl, Hal Chase (Iowa), Raquell Holmes (California), Darius Holt (Maryland), Eileen Kimbell-Meaney (New Jersey), Nancy Abrams (Ohio), Mark Ritter (Kentucky), Perri Benemelis (Arizona), Amy Hamilton (Virginia), Ellen Rauch (Arizona), Madelyn Chapman (New York), Ellen Chaffee (North Dakota), Marian Rich (New York), Monique Sanders (Ohio). Not pictured: Tamara King (Maryland)

Independent Voting's May Spokesperson Training brought together another unique cross-section of independents for education, discussion and performance training. It was an opportunity to develop tools for sharing the history, data, and most importantly, their own stories on why so many of us are choosing to be independent.



(clockwise from top left) Gwen Mandell, Jackie Salit and Darius Holt

"There's no short cut," said Salit, "and I think the work we're doing tonight and our capacity to just simply reach friends, our family, other independents in our local areas, writing letters to the editor, just bringing forth this drumbeat that there is now an enduring force of Americans who want a political system and culture that is other than the one we have...The heart beat of what this movement is about is a resistance to being put into categories, being siloed apart from their fellow Americans and tormented from election cycle to election cycle without being given the space to re-imagine and re-create our democracy."

Amikka Burl (pictured right) from Brownstown, Michigan and graduate of a Spokesperson Training earlier this year, shared her own thoughts and experience about choosing the audience for her performance, and why she chose someone she was close to. "Talking to someone you have a deep connection with can be very impactful, because they may be more susceptible to actually listen. One voice can be the change in your family, in your neighborhood, or your community, so this training will help you to speak with one voice and one message."



Amikka Burl

Following the training, Darius Holt (above photo) from Indian Head, Maryland said: "My favorite part of the workshop was the interaction with other independents and being able to obtain some skills in improving my speaking abilities for independent speaking and future political goals."

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## More Takeaways from Spokeperson Trainees:

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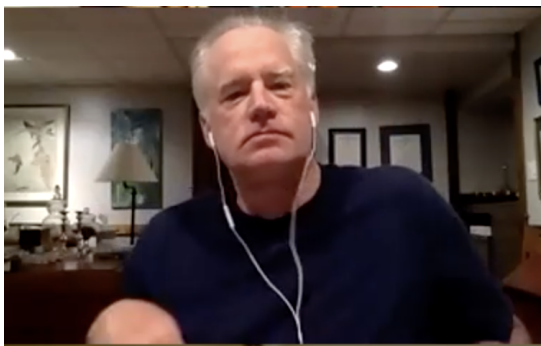
### **Ellen Chaffee of Badass Grandmas • Bismarck, North Dakota**

Ellen Chaffee, leader of the North Dakota Badass Grandmas, said: "The workshop wove together and confirmed my thoughts about why I am an independent and why we need systemic change in elections to empower independents and other non-Republicans/Democrats if we are to have real democracy."



Ellen Chaffee

### **(Retired) Lt. Colonel Mark Ritter • Frankfort, Kentucky**



Mark Ritter

"Workshops expose you. That means a workshop provides an opportunity to practice expressing your status. Most people cannot do this. They either don't have a comfortable script or they really don't know or never had to explain it. The interaction exercises are necessary or you don't accomplish the spokesperson objective. It can be awkward but you have to do it to get over the hump of expression."

### **Dr. Raquell Holmes • Cotati, California**

"Joining the Spokesperson Training gives us the opportunity to develop our own voice. Yet, just as important, is hearing the voice of other independents. It's the diversity and decency of America showing up to learn how to give their concern for our country. It's heart warming and organizing."

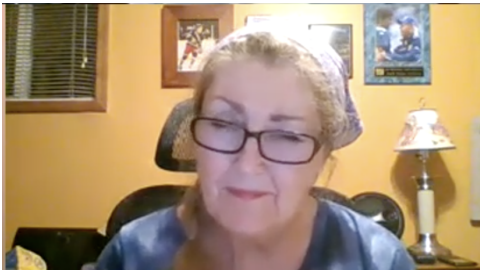


Dr. Raquell Holmes

### **Eileen Kimbell-Meaney • Pompton Lakes, New Jersey**

"With independent voters being the greatest percentage of voters, it's important to recognize the power independent voters have in determining our country's leadership and direction. Since independents do not have a





Eileen Kimbell-Meaney

'party,' this organization brings us together in a forum for education and to discuss politics with like-minded people. Being in this Spokesperson Training Group gave me a clearer understanding that independents are probably the best or only vehicle for change in American politics."

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**If you'd like to apply for an upcoming Spokesperson Training,  
fill out and submit this application today .**

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### **Volunteers Wanted!**

Independent Voting is looking for volunteers who either have experience running zoom meetings or are interested in being trained, to help produce our virtual events. If you are interested in this volunteer opportunity, email [jhemsworth@independentvoting.org](mailto:jhemsworth@independentvoting.org) .

### **Breaking News: Maine Passes Open Primaries**

In an historic bipartisan vote, the Maine legislature passed a semi-open primary bill, allowing independent voters -- 32% of all Maine voters -- the right to pick a party ballot and vote in primary elections for the first time.

In a year in which many states are considering the rollback of voter rights and Congressional reform efforts are falling victim to the partisan playbook, Maine offers a stark contrast. Sizable numbers of Republicans joined with a majority of Democrats to pass the bill 27-7 in the Senate yesterday and 92-52 in the House today. The legislation was championed by Senators Chloe Maxmin (D) and Matthew Pouliot (R).



Sen. Chloe Maxmin

"I am thrilled that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle joined me in supporting semi-open primaries," said bill sponsor Senator Chloe Maxmin (D-Lincoln). "Enacting this common sense reform will align our democratic system with our shared values of civic participation and electoral inclusion."

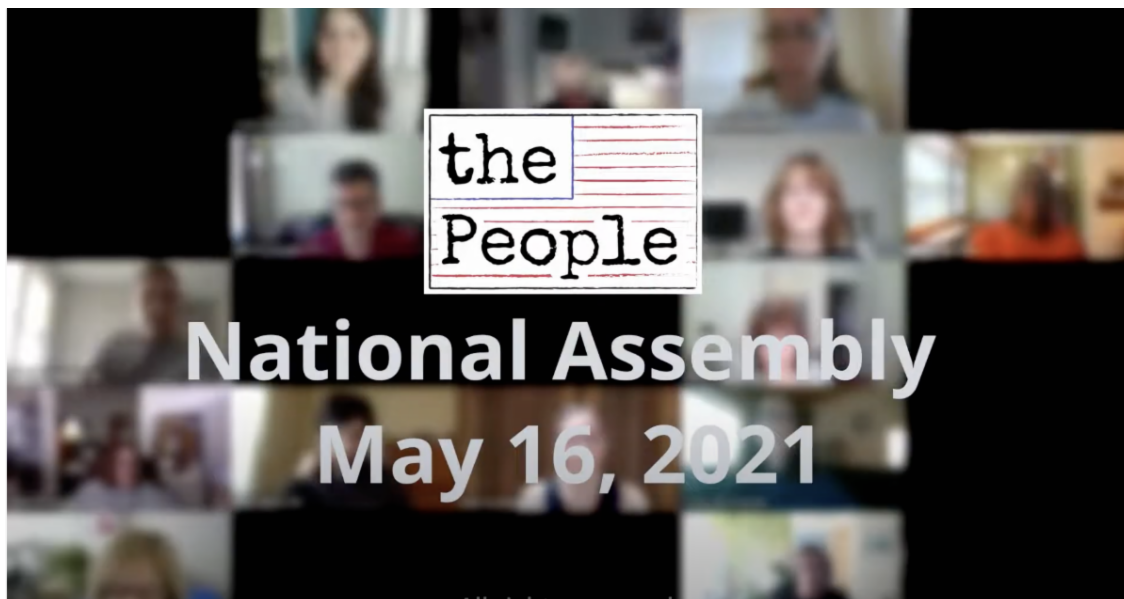
Open Primaries and Open Primaries Maine began work on this issue in 2019. A similar bill was introduced into the 2019 session but failed to pass. After three years of sustained advocacy and public pressure, the bill passed by wide margins in both chambers.

Read [Open Primaries' complete release here](#) .

Read " [Open Primaries Bill Clears Both Maine House and Senate](#) ." ( *Portland Press-Herald* )

## The People's National Assembly Engages Party Politics

The People and Independent Voting co-sponsored citizen engagement forums that explored the influence of money in politics, whether good governing equals good politics, and whether it's possible or desirable to move beyond party politics. On May 16, these discussions were the springboard for the Third Annual National Assembly of The People.



Held virtually, the Assembly brought together dozens of Americans across the political spectrum for an afternoon of facilitated discussions on effective elections. Independent Voting activists from Florida, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Virginia participated in the Assembly.

Katie Fahey, Executive Director of The People, had this to say:

*"For four hours on a beautiful Sunday last month, a diverse group of concerned citizens came together to genuinely hear one another and discuss shared concerns for our democracy. No matter their zip code, voting history, or general perspective, everyone had an opportunity to get into a (virtual) room with people different from themselves and talk about how to create an effective election system. I was gratified to see once again the creative power citizens have when we come together."*

*We know that Independents help determine the results of our elections and it's essential to include their voices in order to create elections with integrity. The perspectives that the Independent Voting activists provided were pivotal to the success of the event. We really value our ongoing partnership with Independent Voting and were thrilled to have such strong representation from the independent voter community."*

Cathy Stewart (Independent Voting's Vice-President for National Development) and one of the discussion facilitators said:

*"The Assembly gave participants a wonderful opportunity to sharpen our capacity to hear one another's perspectives and to create a non-ideological conversation that was not about who the winners of elections are, but about how voters are positioned. I was struck by how strongly the issue of nonpartisanship percolated throughout the day, and what it is possible to discover when you get the political parties out of the way."*

## The Fight to Open the Primaries in Pennsylvania Continues



Jenn Bullock

**Here's an exciting update from Independent Pennsylvanians' Director Jenn Bullock on the fight to open Pennsylvania's primaries:**

"The fight for open primaries in Pennsylvania is gaining momentum!

Another primary in Pennsylvania came and went on May 18th. Once again, the two-party controlled election system **locked out 1.2 million independent voters**. Unfortunately, that is not new.

Fortunately, coalitions of reform groups and politicians are gathering exciting momentum to open the primaries in Pennsylvania. On May 7, the West Chester University Student Association hosted a **panel discussion** on the negative impact of closed primaries on our elections and the health of our democracy. On May 20, the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters, as part of the **Open Primaries PA** coalition, coordinated an important press conference where **Senator Laughlin** announced his sponsorship of SB 690 which would open the primaries to non-affiliated voters. This legislation is supported by Common Cause PA Director **Khalif Ali**. TJ Rooney, former Pennsylvania Democratic Party chair and Allan Novac, former Pennsylvania Republican Party chair, are on an advocacy tour for open primaries, speaking on the influential **Michael Smerconish Show** and writing a powerful op-ed in the **Washington Post**."





## Locked in a Par san System

In a special episode of America's Public Forum, co-sponsored by The National Institute for Civil Discourse, Common Sense America, and Braver Angels, Keith Allred from the National Institute for Civil Discourse interviewed Congressman Derek Kilmer (D-WA) and Congressman William Timmons (R-SC), both on the Select Committee for the Modernization of Congress, on **Reforms to Foster Bipartisanship and Civility in Congress**.

In the Q&A, Steve Hough, Director of Florida Fair and Open Primaries shared his journey as an independent and asked Kilmer and Timmons whether they ever found themselves threatened by party leadership if they tried to work across the aisle. Their answers are forthright and quite revealing. Listen to the question and answers at 39:30 of the video.



Steve Hough

[Click here to go directly to that spot.](#)

## Independent Shares Her Mini-Documentary



Sienna Mae Heath

In her 12-minute micro-documentary *Real Unity*, Sienna Mae Heath illustrates her journey to becoming an independent and invites other independents to tell their story.

She says: "Today the world feels dangerously divided, but we must be careful not to lose our humanity while fighting for humanity itself. Imagine a world where we can grow

together, where we do not rely on government to force progress, and where we embrace our differences as part of what makes the human race so incredible. I was once a pessimistic liberal, but I am now becoming an optimistic independent."

[Watch Sienna's mini-documentary here](#).

## Profiles in Independence

### Madisyn Stogsdill • Kansas City, Kansas

My name is Madisyn Stogsdill, a sixteen-year old, pre-registered Independent residing in Kansas. What introduced me to such a life changing political identity, as well as organization, was the hatred bred within the political hemisphere. As the Founder and President of my own nonpartisan organization by the name of Project Patriarchy, consisting of 100+ members across 15+ countries, I've learned of the value in listening to all opinions! However, as someone so young in the field, that statement is rarely seen, especially among U.S politics.



Madisyn Stogsdill

We live in a country that prides itself on freedom yet has made its people afraid of talking about law, policy, and politics due to its poor reputation -- which is exactly when Independent Voting intervenes. As not only a Spokesperson but also member of its Organizing Committee, I've found solace among this organization that is helping all to be heard -- regardless of a party.

## In the News

Javier Luque, Spokesperson Training graduate and a leader of New Jersey Independent Voters, took the opportunity to write this Letter to the Editor, "**Why I am an Unaffiliated Voter** ." ( *Tapinto.net* )

And here's another letter from Barbara Patrizzi in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, "**Unaffiliated voters and the two party system** ." ( *Courier-Post* ):

Florida independent Linda Lindquist wrote her Letter to the Editor about "**Independents disenfranchised in the primaries** ." ( *Ft. Myers News-Press* )

Read "**End the closed primary in PA** ", an op-ed by Terrie Griffin, president of the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters. ( *GoErie.com* )

## In the News

Scott Maxwell of the *Orlando Sentinel* reports: "Florida lawmakers say they're sick of big money corrupting politics. So they passed a law that makes it a crime for anyone to give more than \$3,000 to a political committee. Except not all political committees. Just the ones working to get issues like smaller class sizes or a higher minimum wage on Florida ballots. Lawmakers' own political committees can still accept unlimited cash." The bill passed after 57% of Floridians (just short of the 60% required) voted for a top-two nonpartisan primaries amendment to the Florida state constitution. Read "**Florida lawmakers limit donations to amendment drives, but not their own committees** ." ( *Orlando Sentinel* )

Kevin Frazier, a student at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, who publishes *The Oregon Way*, a nonpartisan blog, writes "**We need politicians who are not puppets** ." ( *The Fulcrum* )

Gwen Mandell

Director of National Outreach

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