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*August 17, 2021*

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# 20TH ANNUAL ANTI-CORRUPTION AWARDS

*Yearning to breathe free?  
Give me your independents!*



VIRTUAL EVENT MONDAY EVENING  
OCTOBER 25TH, 2021

*Independent Voting's 20th Annual Awards and Fundraiser will be a national virtual extravaganza. This is an event you'll want to invite others to! Mark your calendar and let your friends, family and coworkers know too, so they can hold the date. Stay tuned for more details!*

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## Independents Gather to Discuss a Novel of the Next World War

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Cathy Stewart, Elliot Ackerman and Admiral James Stavridis

*2034: A Novel of The Next World War*, co-authored by Elliot Ackerman and Admiral James Stavridis, is a geopolitical thriller that imagines a naval clash between the United States and China in the South China Sea that results in a cascade of events, missteps and maneuvers that plunge the world into a nuclear war. It takes a look at the fault lines in our foreign policy and political culture that exist today. The book was this summer's selection of the **Politics for the People Book Club**, and on Thursday, August 12, Stavridis and Ackerman joined Politics for the People Book Club founder Cathy Stewart and book club members from around the country to discuss the book. The event was sponsored by **Independent Voting** and **The People**.

A broad conversation ensued with participants from across the country asking the authors a wide array of questions. The book was a jump-off point for a fascinating in-depth discussion about the state of international relations, what Americans misunderstand about China, the human missteps and miscalculations of key characters in the book, the diplomatic work needed to recalibrate our foreign policy toward China and reform our political process itself.

Said Admiral Stavridis: "I hope people will say this is a cautionary tale, this is what we don't want to happen, and then they'll begin to think more seriously how to avoid it, how to reverse engineer ourselves back from the calamitous year we described in *2034* and avoid sleepwalking, stumbling into a war with

China....We need a strategy that is not premised on military domination or economic imperialism."

In response to a question by Tiani Coleman, president of New Hampshire Independent Voters and a member of the book club, Elliott Ackerman responded: "One of the very strong subtexts of the book is that the greatest national security threat that faces the United States is our own internal dysfunction and inability to act and meet these threats appropriately ... Citizens in this country need to get into the weeds and do some of the reform work. Our democracy only stays healthy if people and future generations are continually committed to tending that garden."

Stewart explored with the authors how they came to collaborate and tackle the fault lines in U.S./China foreign policy through a novel set in 2034. In the book, the President of the United States is a woman and an independent, and Stewart asked the authors about this choice. Admiral Stavridis replied, "Making her an independent was a foreshadowing that we're going to find our way to rethinking about a political process that is irretrievably broken."

**Watch the full discussion.**





# SPOKESPERSON TRAINING

**Want to Help Make Independents Visible?  
Join the Spokesperson Training September 14**

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

The seminar is part educational, part performance training.

Registration is 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.**

## **Real Talk: Understanding Latino Voters**

**Open Primaries'** final virtual discussion of the season focused on the potency of Latino voters, 40% of whom now identify as independent.

The discussion, moderated by Open Primaries' John Opdycke, featured Cecilia Ballí and Michael Powell, authors of the groundbreaking report: "**Real Talk: Understanding Texas Latino Voters Through Meaningful Conversation**"

As reported by Shawn Griffiths for *The Fulcrum* in "**Researchers Combat Myths About Latino Voting**," the authors "spent hundreds of hours talking and listening to Latino voters to get a nuanced understanding of how they felt about the political process. And what they found is a serious disconnect between the political parties and Latino communities."

**Watch the full discussion.**

### Real Talk: Understanding Latino Voters



### Connecting with Independents in Louisiana

A team of Independent Voting volunteers spent the last several months surveying and connecting with African American independents in Louisiana. The telephone outreach project was put into motion when a bill to close the congressional primaries in the state was slated to be introduced. Leaders of the Open Primaries team worked with elected officials to make sure that the bill never came up.



Dr. Elouise Joseph

In Louisiana, 26.6% of the registered voters are independents. Over 200,000 of those voters are African American, and 29% of African American voters are independent. Almost half of those polled were under 39 years old.

Ninety-three percent of those polled wanted to make sure the primaries stayed open to all voters. Seventy-one percent reported that they experienced people assuming that they were Democrats because they were African American and expressed concern that African Americans who are independent do not get the respect they deserve from the media, political parties or candidates.

Said Dr. Elouise Joseph, a coordinator of the project, who now resides in California: "I was excited to speak with so many Black people, young and older, from my home state, who are not willing to tow the party line. I was encouraged that the young independents see their independence as a very ordinary thing and are not assumed to be Democrats among their circle of friends and colleagues. Most of all, what made the calls worth it were the thanks we received from people who are generally neglected in electoral politics and were pleasantly surprised that we were reaching out to them...that they matter."

Fifty-five percent of people who were spoken with, expressed an interest in coming together with other independents across the state. Independent Voting will be hosting a zoom call this month to do just that.

### **Preserving a NonPartisan System in Nebraska**

Independent Voting's Vice President for National Development Cathy Stewart was the invited guest speaker at Nonpartisan Nebraska's quarterly advisory board meeting. Nathan Leach, the Executive Director of the newly formed organization, had reached out to Independent Voting to ask if we would address his organization about the growing trend toward independence.



Nathan Leach

NonPartisan Nebraska was formed in September of 2020 to defend Nebraska's nonpartisan unicameral system through education, research and civic engagement. Recently, the system has been coming under increasing attack. Leach has organized an inspiring group of democracy leaders, with a board chaired by former Senator Al Davis, and a wide array of community leaders, business people, academics, and political activists.

Stewart's talk, Independent Voters: A Restless State of Affairs, gave the Advisory Board an overview of the rise of independent identification by Americans, the role independents play in determining the outcome of national elections and the increased recognition of the enduring nature of this community of voters. She described the common myths about independents,

which are important to break through to better understand who independents are.

There was a rich conversation exploring what it means for 45-50% of Americans to self-identify as independents, regardless of how they might register to vote in any state, and the need for new approaches in polling that move beyond understanding independents simply as "leaners." There was a discussion about the barriers to participation in the political process that independents face, and the uniqueness of the nonpartisan Nebraska unicameral system.

At the end of the event, Nathan Leach asked Stewart if she had any advice for the Advisory Board on how to continue their mission. She said: "Obviously you know the terrain in Nebraska and this is a comment from afar. That said, I think Nebraskans need to meet you. You are an inspiring group of nonpartisan leaders and I would encourage you to speak to people across the state about the critical importance of the Nebraska model and the need to preserve and extend it."

Leach concluded by saying: "Nonpartisan Nebraska appreciates the work of Independent Voting and we look forward to deepening the ties between our two organizations.

Independents are currently 21.72% of the registered voters.

Check out these articles about the formation of NonPartisan Nebraska:

**"Kearney Man Forms NonPartisan Nebraska"** (*Lincoln Journal-Star*)

**"Nonpartisan Nebraska Organization Launches to Fight Partisanship in Unicameral Formed by Kearneyite"** (*Kearney Hub*)

## **Tennessee Independents Launched**

**Here's an update from Aaron James about the new group, Tennessee Independents:**

Great things are happening in Tennessee!

Over the course of the last several months, a number of steps have been taken in an effort



to organize independent and disenfranchised voters in the great state of Tennessee. More often than not written off as a devoutly red state, the actual numbers tell a much different story.



Aaron James

Of the roughly 6,000,000 Tennesseans of voting age, the last election was decided by just over half that number, with 3,074,691 actual votes cast. This means that more Tennesseans DID NOT VOTE, than voted for both of the two main party presidential candidates combined. Even if you discount the 6,000,000 figure by 10% for those who, for whatever reason, are not eligible to vote, that still leaves 2,325,310 votes not cast. That's an election! Imagine what a powerful force we could be if we were organized.

Tennessee is no more a red state than the U.S. is either a red or blue country. We have simply been conditioned — over time and quite deliberately — to accept all things political as being beyond our control. This effort to organize is an open and unfettered effort to reach those who can see beyond the smoke and mirrors, who understand the power of their individual vote, and who refuse to relinquish control of their very existence to a handful of career politicians and their handlers.

In June of this year, Catana Malinowski (Paris), Trudy Austin (Crossville) and myself (Memphis) launched Tennessee Independents by reviewing a powerpoint presentation on independents and discussing plans for expanding Tennessee Independents. We are looking for independent-minded folk across the state to help. Our needs at the moment are for a regional point person in each of the three Grand Divisions and one primary contact in each of our 95 counties. You can reach us via email at: **[tennesseeindependents@gmail.com](mailto:tennesseeindependents@gmail.com)**; or by joining our Facebook group: "Tennessee Independents."

**Profiles in Independence**

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## **Damien Hughes • Gate City, Virginia**

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I was born and raised in the quiet community tucked away in the peaceful town of Gate City, Virginia. I'm a software developer by trade and have a natural passion for creating a better society.

After the Hillary-Donald presidential campaign disaster of 2016, I found myself completely burned out on politics. I thought, "How is it possible in a country as advanced as ours that those two people are the two most qualified citizens to be 'leader of the free world'?"



Damien Hughes

Around the end of 2019, I had the audacious idea to run for public office. This led me to seek like-minded organizations and partner with the non-partisan, anti-corruption group RepresentUs. COVID came along and derailed my initial plans to announce my candidacy.

During the course of those final weeks, I decided to reach out to Steve Richardson (the chairman of Virginia Independent Voters Assn (VIVA) to see if he'd be interested in signing my petition. (He did.) I decided I needed to refocus my energy on fixing the broken system that made it impossible for ordinary citizens to run as independents. That led me to reach out to Steve and join VIVA. He referred me to the national Independent Voting group. We also discussed partnering together to reboot VIVA.

I look forward to meeting more independents on my journey and to working together to fix our broken democracy so that everyone has a voice, not just those who are willing to kneel at the altar of partisanship.

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## **Alice Rydel • New York, New York**

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My name is Alice Rydel and I'm an independent voter. I'm proud to have worked nationally on both of Dr. Lenora Fulani's presidential campaigns. I live in New York City and have been a community organizer for



Alice Rydel

about 50 years. I also enjoy drawing political/social commentary cartoons (see below). Way back then, I met progressives who raised the question (the challenge really): “How do we build with everything we’ve got, including all the crap?”

Originally from a white, working class neighborhood in Chicago, I saw a lot of crap: White flight, a fire bombing, fights, school segregation. In my teenage years, a dear friend’s husband, a front-line scout in Vietnam, was sickened by Agent Orange. She petitioned Senator Percy to bring him home and I signed her petition. There was no response. Her husband served a full tour of duty and died a couple years later. Her son was born with a mental disability. This was a catalyst for me, along with a growing awareness of racism, sexism and the anti-war movement. The political process did not represent ordinary people and I wanted to do something about it. Still do.

Sadly, having our voices heard takes long-term building.



**In the News**

Read "**Not our first choice: How to better employ RCV in NYC's future**," which looked at the recent mayoral race in a closed primary state, where independents were locked out of voting, and the use of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) for the first time in that race. (*New York Daily News*)

City Councilman for Perkasio Borough's third ward (located in Pennsylvania) and independent voter, Scott Bomboy writes, "**I am an independent, and 'hey, we matter!'**" (*Montgomery News-Herald*)

Long-time independent Gordon Hill, Missouri, comments on "**Encouraging open primaries**" (*Maryville Forum*)

Rep. Mike Capuano's and Former Vermont Governor Jim Douglas' show bipartisan support for reforming our primaries in "**How to unite a divided nation**" (*MSN.com*)

Meet the Press moderator and *NBC News* Director Chuck Todd writes: "**America's two major political parties are simply too big.**" (*MSNBC*)

Read Frank Fear's **review of the Politics for the Book Club selection**, *2034: A Novel of the Next World War* (*LA Progressive*)

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