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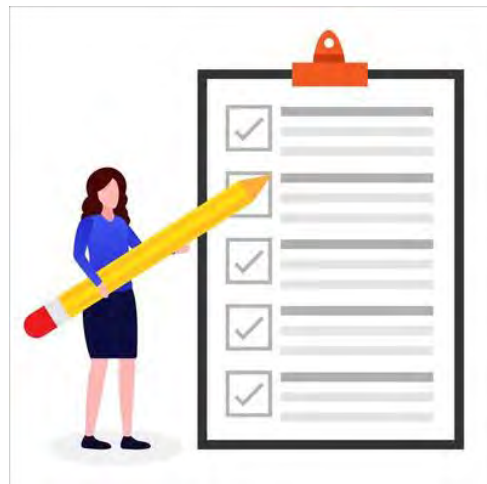
March 21, 2023

Independents Take Note

A Note from Editor of *The Hub* - By Gwen Mandell

Here are some interesting events I noticed as the political season heats up and we head towards 2024:

When The Forward Party was started – Andrew Yang, former Governor Christine Todd Whitman (Renew America) and former Congressman David Jolly (Serve America Movement) announced the formation of a “new kind of political party in American politics” last summer – the effort was immediately attacked. Democratic Party strategist **James Carville**



told **CNN's Jim Acosta** that it was a “stupid idea,” and dubbed the move “performance art.” As Acosta proudly pointed out, Carville “helped Bill Clinton beat a guy named Ross Perot.” Carville went on to list other independent presidential candidates who he regarded as spoilers for the Democratic Party presidential nominees.

When Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema declared that she would be leaving the Democratic Party to become an independent in December, the barbs and questions about her “ulterior motives” were severe and targeted, with **this opinion piece in *The New York Times*** being just one example. (Listen to Independent Voting President Jackie Salit’s appearance on *KJZZ-Arizona* below for a different perspective.)

Then, the organization No Labels began to file petitions to create independent lines on the 2024 presidential ballot in all 50 states as “an insurance policy in the event both major parties nominate presidential candidates that the vast majority of Americans don't want.” The announcement was immediately met with backlash from some in the beltway. Democratic Party strategist and CNN political commentator Paul Begala wrote that “organizing a moderate third-party candidacy for president in 2024 would, despite their stated intentions, likely reward the most extreme, most divisive, most angry forces in our politics.” Begala (and Ed Kilgore, in **“*The Intelligencer*” column of *New York magazine***) cite a report written by the think tank Third Way **that argues that** a No Labels third-party candidacy would “kneecap Biden” and “re-elect Trump.”

Whatever one thinks of each of these various strategies – the formation of the Forward Party, Sinema’s decision to go independent or No Labels' intention to get on the ballot in all 50 states – the message from the political establishment to voters is clear – “stay away from them!” Whenever something appears on the political terrain that is outside two-party control, powerful voices are raised against it. Currently, the majority of attacks have come from the Democratic Party, no surprise. It’s currently the party in power in the White House and doesn’t want anything in its way that can upset the apple cart. Meanwhile the country is reeling from ineffectuality and partisan control of the two-party system.

So what are independents to do? How independents might shape and participate in various strategies for 2024 are open questions. And there might be many different answers. I think we need to keep building and making ourselves visible. Read below about some of the many activities that independents and reformers are involved in across the country to do just that.

Independents Telling Our Story

Independent Voting's training event, the highly popular Spokesperson Training, took place on February 27, convening a grouping of 19 diverse independents with a lot to say about why they became independent. The 2 hour and 15 minute program is conducted several times a year on Zoom, and to date has already trained hundreds of independents from all over the United States.

The training began with a **PowerPoint presentation** to provide participants with a lot of statistics and trends. But as we emphasize in the training: "That's important information for people to hear. But the most important thing is for you to tell the American people why you became an independent and what that means to you!"



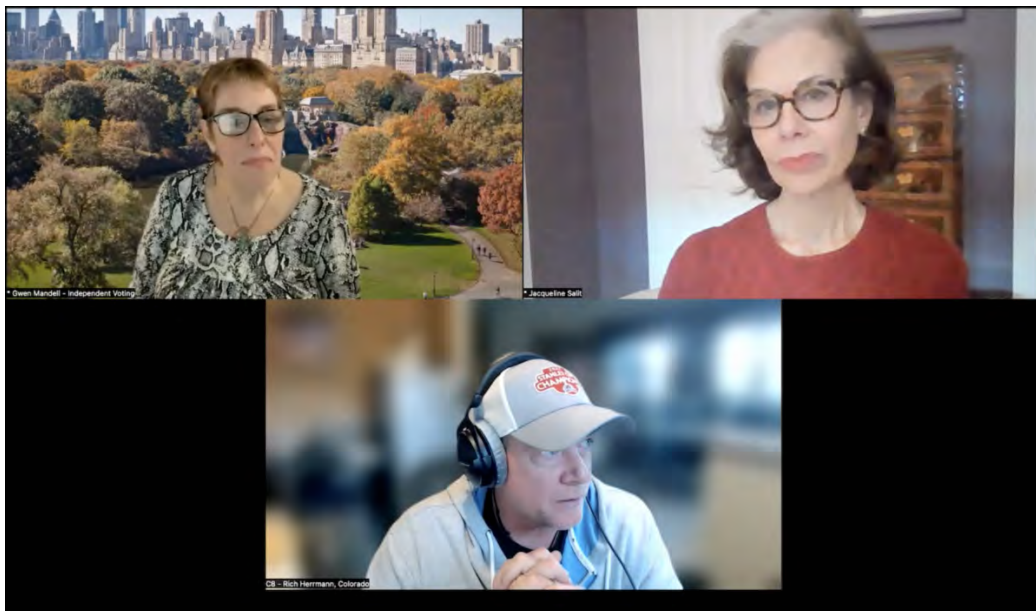
From Top Row (left to right): Wanda Jones (Florida); Ed Brady (New York); Brandon Aceto (Texas); Kyle C. Gibson (Florida) **Second Row:** Nancy Abrams (Ohio); David Paine (California); Tony Brown (Pennsylvania); Wesley Bryant (Kentucky) **Third Row:** Rich Herrmann (Colorado); Jan Mosca (South

Carolina); Kyle Frohlich (Florida); Nathan Leach (Nebraska) **Fourth Row:** Jon Ramirez (Kansas); John Lutman (Pennsylvania); Denise Scott (Florida); Lou Hinman (New York)

Bottom Row: Alexandra Legion (Florida); Christopher Aune (Indiana); Andy Dawkins (Minnesota)

In a Q&A session with Independent Voting President Jackie Salit, questions were posed focusing on money (How do we attract investors?), media (Is there a way to generate our own media?) and open primaries (Are we making progress?). These questions were asked by Nancy Abrams (Ohio), David Paine (California) and Rich Herrmann (Colorado).

Salit had much to say about these issues, but she stressed: "As independents – part of why it's so important to tell our stories, and why we're doing this training – we have to demonstrate to the country, to our fellow citizens, that there is a new constituency in America and it's the independent voter. Based on the Gallup surveys – between 40 and 50% identify as independent. In market terms, that's a huge untapped market. The bottom line: No American should be required to join a political organization as a condition for participating in our democracy."



Gwen Mandell, Jackie Salit, Rich Herrmann

Participants were then invited to deliver a short talk using all they had learned, and to hear how theirs and others' resonated with the group. Veteran performance trainers (and independents) Cathy Salit and Maureen Kelly helped each participant to carefully craft their message – whether their prospective audience was a podcast, a voting base, or a personal friend.

Wanda Jones (Florida) was direct and clear. She said: "There are 40% of the people who are nonpartisan voters in the United States and we are denied access although we are taxpayers. We are citizens who have the right to vote, but the state says we cannot, and I chose to become a No Party Affiliation (NPA) from Democrat after I learned politics and realized that neither party identifies with what I believe. Because I chose to stand with my belief legally, I cannot vote in the primary. That should be changed."



Cathy Salit and Maureen Kelly

I am an independent because. . .

(excerpts from the exercise led by Cathy Salit and Maureen Kelly at the end of the training)

". . .because I want to be part of a movement that topples the two-party duopoly." (Andy Dawkins, St. Paul, Minnesota, is a former legislator and author of political reform, anti-poverty, and equal justice legislation.)

". . .because I want to see change in how our elections are conducted and the best way to do that is from standing outside it." (Alexandra Leigon of Tavares, Florida has been a critical-care nurse for 25 years.)

". . .because I am disillusioned with the major parties and how they want to dictate our thoughts. I insist upon freedom of thought." (John Lutman of Arnold, Pennsylvania is a CPA/Program Manager, working at a Fortune 500 company.)

". . .because I'm tired of being told that this country can make room for everyone and make a beautiful and wonderful life for all." (Jackie Salit, President of Independent Voting.)

Want to Help Make Independents Visible? Join the Spokesperson Training and learn how to tell your story!

Here's are testimonials from two of the participants in last month's training:

Tony Brown, former Director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority and leader in community development

"This experience is useful for America's independents because it equips us with the tools we need to cut through the noise generated by news commentators, opinion writers, Hollywood elites, and people stuck in a bubble of disinformation."



Christopher Aune, Retired Master Sgt.; retired Public Affairs Director; current state leader for the Indiana Forward Party.



"You have a reason you are an independent. This workshop helps us to communicate our reasons clearly and impactfully. I wouldn't miss it!"

Independent Voting's Spokesperson Trainings take place several times a year. No prior speaking experience is required. If you'd like to apply for an upcoming training, **[fill out and submit this application today.](#)**

Nuts and Bolts for Independents

Twenty activists from 14 states joined Independent Voting Vice President for National Development Cathy Stewart and Director of National Outreach Gwen Mandell for "Nuts and Bolts for Independents," a workshop for independents who are looking for guidance on next steps in organizing other independents. Mandell created the workshop for activists to benefit from Stewart's expertise and years of experience in developing community organizing and campaign tactics big and small. The workshop, which is held on Zoom several times a year, is also an opportunity for activists to learn from each other's questions and activities.



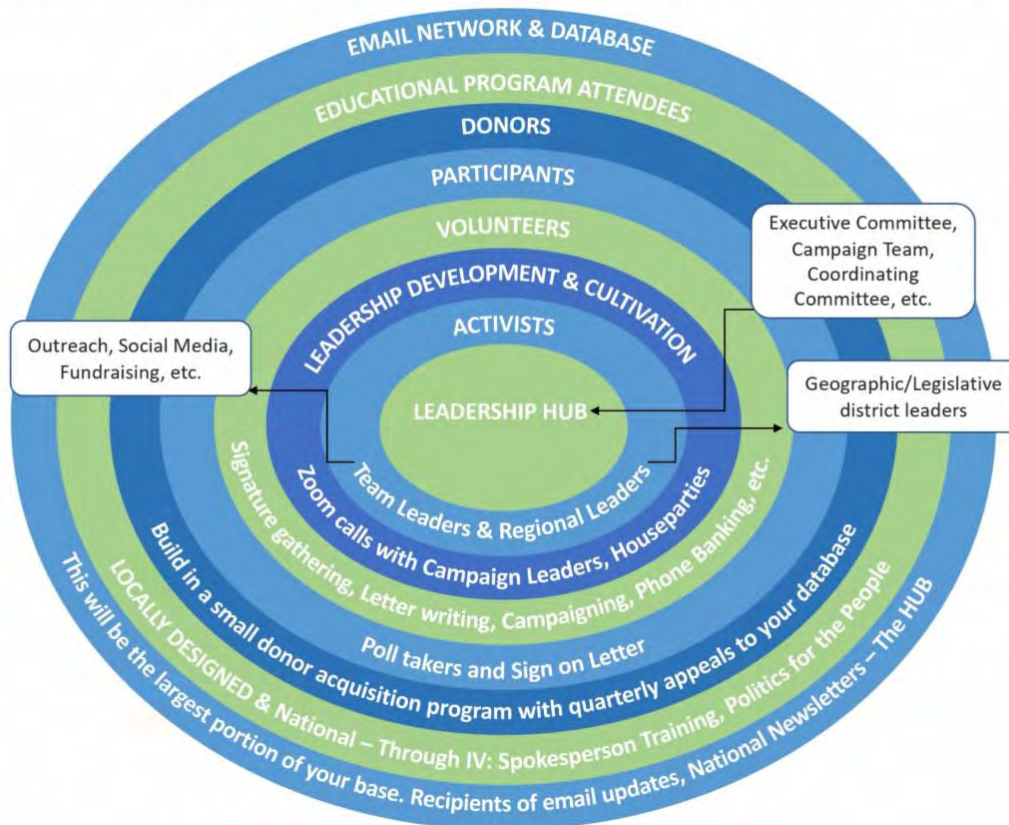
In response to questions about building groups and running legislative and political reform campaigns, Stewart led the group in a detailed discussion on how to build and energize an independent base.



"This is my favorite question and life's work," she said. I will share some things that are helpful that you'll be able to tease out in your particular situation. . . I also want to say to all of us that our challenge is huge! The work we're doing to shine the spotlight on independent voters across the country – we are the largest constituency of voters, but we are both not recognized and unorganized and the work to organize independents as a community of voters that could transform our democracy is completely underfunded . . . We're at a point where some things are going to shift solely because the pressure on the political system is huge, there's a failure to address the crisis and because so many Americans are making a statement of non-compliance."

Stewart shared this chart below, which she called the Concentric Circles of Influence and walked the group through the process of building a base of support.

Creating an Independent Base - Circles of Influence



A second grouping of questions probed a variety of relevant topics, ranging from "closed primaries as a voter suppression issue," "working through another organization to explain

to its membership the value of registering independent," "advocating for independents after the legislative session ends" and how to make use of (and promote) the book, *The Independent Voter*, as a tool to build the independent movement.



Steve Barratt, Long Valley, New Jersey:

"It's a marathon not a sprint, so sessions like this one help to sustain those of us who are new to the fight." said Steve Baratt, a leader of New Jersey Independent Voters, who is working on open primaries legislation in the state.

Jackie Fuller, Alexandria, Virginia:

"The Nuts and Bolts workshop was a great opportunity for me to have questions answered on educating people about independent voters. It also gave me insight on the challenges electoral reform advocates are facing across the country and solutions to overcome the roadblocks."



On the Front Lines of Democracy: A Virtual Discussion

Check out this virtual discussion with Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, co-sponsored by Open Primaries, ASU's Center for Independent and Sustainable Democracy and Save Democracy AZ:

The image shows a YouTube video player interface. The video title is "On the Front Lines of Democracy: Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes". The date and time are "02.27.23 (4PM EST)". The video thumbnail features the text "ON THE FRONT LINES OF DEMOCRACY: ARIZONA SECRETARY OF STATE ADRIAN FONTES" with a red play button icon. The video player includes a "Watch later" button and a "Share" button. The "FEATURING" list includes Adrian Fontes (SOS, Arizona), John Opdycke (Open Primaries), and Danny Ortega (Raza Development Fund). The "Co-Sponsored by" list includes ASU's Center for an Independent & Sustainable Democracy and Save Democracy AZ. The bottom of the player shows logos for "Watch on YouTube", "OPEN PRIMARIES", "SAVE DEMOCRACY ARIZONA", and "ASU Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy".

Semi-Open Primaries Bill Making Headway in New Mexico

New Mexicans are nearing the finish line in their fight for semi-open primaries with **Senate Bill 73** (SB 73).

The bill would enfranchise the 25% of New Mexican voters who are not registered in either party. This segment of registered voters consists disproportionately of groups that particularly need to be heard, including veterans, young adults and people of color.



"Since 2016, **New Mexico Open Elections** has been working on extending full voting rights to all voters, especially disenfranchised independent voters. A semi-open primary election bill like our SB73 has never before made it through a legislative chamber in our state. It is the furthest any semi-open primary bill has ever travelled through a legislature other than Maine, which passed such a bill recently. After passing one House committee, it awaits a hearing in the final committee, House Judiciary, which gives much hope to advocates and voters, particularly to the 325,000 independent voters in New Mexico who are excluded in our closed primary system." (Bob Perls, Founder and President of New Mexico Open Elections)

In an **op-ed written for the *Albuquerque Journal***, Karla Eickhoff, Board Member of New Mexico Open Elections says:

"This is a voting-rights bill, driven by the fundamental principle that everybody deserves to have their voice heard.

It's a simple enough principle, but not all opportunities to be heard are the same. Are people who show up to vote in November, where they choose one of two polarized options in a string of races that are already as good as decided, really being heard?"

[Read the full op-ed here.](#)

Also, read "**Let Open Primaries Bill Be Heard**" in the *Santa Fe New American*.

More State Roundups

South Dakota

South Dakota Open Primaries filed its top-two open primaries wording with the state late in 2022.



Joe Kirby, chairman of South Dakota Open Primaries told *The Hub*: "We are about done with the review process and hope to be circulating petitions in April. We need approximately 35,000 valid signatures so we plan to get at least 50,000 throughout the year. South Dakota is in the process of changing its filing deadline after it lost a federal court case last month. We expect our petitions will be filed in the first half of 2024 and the issue will go to voters in November.

We have a very strong group of supporters assembled in the state, along with ample support from national groups. We are optimistic about our chances. We believe South Dakota will be a better place when more voters are able to participate in the electoral process."

[Read more here.](#)

Oklahoma

Margaret Kobos shares with *The Hub* why she founded [Oklahoma United for Progress](#):



"I founded Oklahoma United for Progress when I saw that Oklahoma was dead last in US eligible voter participation. Only 54% of eligible voters voted in the 2020 Oklahoma general election. In that same year, only 31% of eligible voters participated in the primaries. Only 17% of all registered Oklahoma voters cast votes in the 2022 midterms –critical elections that included races for Governor and US Senate. Although of course we always want those eligible to register to vote, it's clear that Oklahoma doesn't have a voter registration problem. It has a turnout problem. Low voter turnout feeds distrust and poor government. It's a sign of a diseased community, and obviously produces disconnection between policies and the people. Ultimately, this lack of synchronous democracy becomes an economic problem.

"Repeal of Oklahoma's closed-primary system is the fundamental and obvious starting point to improve citizen engagement. Nearly 20% of Oklahoma voters are registered independent. That number has grown to approximately 400,000, at a higher rate than either mainstream party. Most military members identify as independent. The majority of younger people also identify and register as independents. We want and need their talents and ideas.

"It's just common sense to open Oklahoma primaries and scoop up all our patriotic voters who want to be part of the process, participate in public service, and are footing the bill for all elections. Closed primaries are simply wrong. To be our best at home and abroad, we simply must start with the most basic American right in a democracy: Let all Oklahoma voters vote."

Check out this coverage of a recent local gathering of the group below.



Oregon

A number of efforts are underway in Oregon to make it possible for 1.2 million Oregonians to participate more fully in Oregon's elections. Oregon currently has closed primaries, which exclude independents from voting.



IP-16 (All Oregon Votes) is a proposed constitutional amendment that would guarantee the right of all registered voters to participate in all Oregon elections regardless of their party or non-affiliation. Recently the proposal passed a key hurdle when the Oregon Department of Justice issued a draft ballot title, and leaders of All Oregon Votes are in the process of gathering the initial 1,100 "Sponsorship" signatures to get the process going.

Read "[Why this Initiative](#)" to learn more.

Michael Calcagno, president of Oregon Open primaries explains: "It's a crisis – just 13 percent of Americans believe our country is on the right track. Dysfunctional government and toxic polarization amplify the most destructive and corrupt influences. It's tearing our communities limb from limb. All Oregon Votes is a powerful movement of local leaders standing up for a better way, and advocating for open primaries in Oregon. This proposal will enact a critical voting rights amendment in the state constitution to end the restrictions that harm our faith in democracy. This citizen initiative petition is a referendum to end the exclusionary closed partisan vote and will usher in a new era of better elections and better government. With the consent of voters who will approve the ballot measure in November 2024, this amendment will force our state legislature to adopt a common-ballot open

primary such as top-two or top-four, which allows all voters an equal voice and all candidates a level playing field."

"**The Oregon Election Reform Act (IP-19)**," explained Michael DeWolf of the Oregon Election Reform Coalition, "is a statutory initiative that will simplify Oregon's electoral process and make it much more equitable and competitive. It will sweep away partisan restrictions on who can vote, who can run, and who voters can vote for in our publicly funded primary elections. At last, independent voters and candidates will be able to participate on equal terms in our elections! The Reform Act will require that all candidates compete on the same primary ballot, with the top five candidates in each race advancing to the general election. General election voters will be able to express their preferences through ranking or scoring candidates. [See our website for details!](#)"



DeWolf emphasized that the two initiatives reinforce each other. One is focused on locking down rights by amending the constitution and the other operationalizes those rights through specific process reforms.

KJZZ: What Does Rep. Sinema's Switch Mean to Independent Voters?

From *KJZZ-Arizona*: "When Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema left the Democratic Party to become an independent [recently], it sent shock waves through the political world. But it also put a spotlight on political independents — elected officials and not — who do not identify with, or belong to a political party.



In Arizona, that's more than a third of registered voters — more than those registered as Democrats and around 28,000 fewer than Republicans, according to newly-released numbers.



So, what might Sinema's switch mean for those independents? To find out, Jackie Salit, co-director of the Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy at Arizona State University and president of IndependentVoting.org, joined The Show."

[Listen to the radio interview here.](#)

Listen to Independents, Don't Negate Them

Political scientist Lee Drutman recently asserted in *The Atlantic* that political independence is both misguided and essentially meaningless.



John Opdycke



Jeremy Gruber

He said: "Therein lies the problem of political independence. Independence exists only in relation to the existing alternatives, in a weird negative space. It does not build. It only rejects."

In an op-ed appearing on *Smerconish.com*, John Opdycke and Jeremy Gruber, President and Senior Vice President of Open Primaries responded:

"The anti-slavery movement of the mid-19th century was a rejection movement. Its adherents – whether abolitionist, anti-expansionist, or moralist – were rejecting the inhuman and unsustainable institution of slavery. The building process, which led to the creation of the Republican Party and the election of an independent president, grew out of the fertile soil of rejection. Drutman, who advocates strongly for the creation of new parties, should think twice before he negates a mass base of Americans who, deprived of meaningful tools to assert a new direction for the country, are doing what they can, namely identifying themselves as a rejection of the corrupt and partisan status quo and voting in ways that give some expression to that sentiment."

[Read the full op-ed here.](#)

Political Parties Should Be Loyal To Voters, Not the Other Way Around

Following Senator Kyrsten Sinema's announcement that she was leaving the Democratic Party to become an independent, Steve Richardson, chair of the Virginia Independent Voter Association wrote a Letter to the Editor, published by the *Washington Post*. He said:



Steve Richardson, with Jackie Salit

"Both major parties are guilty of demanding obedience from every member on every vote. They created rules maximizing party power. This appeals to voters who see politics as war but ignores those whose views are not ideological and who would prefer to vote on issues. What if, instead of insisting voters pledge loyalty to a party, the parties pledged loyalty to us?"

[Read the full Letter to the Editor here.](#)

Profiles in Independence

Wesley Bryant Jenkins, Kentucky



Wesley Bryant

When you don't belong where do you go? I thought I belonged with the Democratic Party my entire life – that was until last summer when floods swept through Eastern Kentucky and I was left without a home – physically, mentally and politically.

No man is an island, though. As a basketball coach and social worker, I've dedicated my life to helping others, but when it was time to receive help, there was nobody around to help.

I reached out to the Democratic Party in Kentucky. Silence. Birds chirping. Excuses. No results.

How could the party that cares about people not care about the people in Eastern Kentucky? Folks lost everything. They got little aid and a lot of promises. But no help. I've been living in a camper displaced from my home since last fall.

Maybe the Republican Party could help? But it was a lot of the same from them. Excuses. Excuses. No funding.

One side didn't care. But neither did the other side. That opened my eyes. The independents didn't promise anything. But they listened. They took an interest in my plight. They wanted to hear my ideas about how to help overlooked rural places like Eastern Kentucky. Sometimes listening helps. It shows caring and compassion. It grows hope in faith and humanity. But it takes people to make a change. I want to help be a voice for the voiceless; a beacon of hope for the

hopeless.

The independent movement doesn't have the money or power of the two parties, but it has a growing base, a base of folks who are fed up with the two-party system and want to see real change, real compassion and real caring.

I want to represent that in Eastern Kentucky and help make a difference and help people who need it. The independent movement offers me the best outlook to help the most people because they aren't tied down to one ideology or way of thinking. They want what's best. And so do I!

In the News

Read Thom Reilly's Commentary, "**Independent voters are pretty unpredictable, not shadow partisans.**" Reilly is co-director of the Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy at Arizona State University. (*Nevada Current*, republished from *The Conversation*)

Read "**The America I wish to see,**" by Jarell Corley, a US Army Field Artillery Officer currently serving in South Korea, Independent Voting leader, and a native of Chicago. (*The Fulcrum*)

Read "**If 'Independent' were a party, it could dominate American politics.**" (*The Hill*)

Kipp Frohlich, who participated in the spokesperson training on February 27, got his letter to the editor published. Read "**Two political parties shouldn't rule our lives.**" (*Tallahassee Democrat*)

Read "**Young Voters Are Abandoning American Political Parties in Droves,**" by Russell Paine. (*New York Sun*)

Read "**US Court Nullifies Delaware Laws that Discriminate Against Independent Voters.**" (*Independent Voter Network*)

More on Kyrsten Sinema and No Labels in "**Kyrsten Sinema Hates Being Labeled So Much, She Could Join No Labels.**" (*Huffington Post*)

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