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August 15, 2023

Independent Leaders Send Letter to "Meet the Press" Host Chuck Todd

Eighty-four independent leaders from 38 states plus Washington D.C. signed their name to a letter sent by Independent Voting commending him on his coverage of independents over the years. Todd will be stepping down as moderator of NBC's "Meet the Press" at the end of the summer. **The letter was published in full by the *Independent Voter Network*** with the names and states of all the signers. It says:

Dear Chuck,

We received your announcement that you will be stepping down as moderator of NBC's "Meet The Press" with mixed reaction. Of course, we are happy that you are on to your next chapter and wish you all the best. However, we are sorry to see you go and lament that independent voters, currently between 40 and 50% of the electorate according to the latest Gallup polls, will be losing a valuable voice!



Chuck Todd

We are independents ourselves, with varying viewpoints and backgrounds, who have chosen to speak in whatever ways we can about why we decided to be independent, because we believe that the voice of independents is vital if we are to move forward as a country. While we are as diverse as the country itself and may vary in our reasons for

being independent, we're deeply disenchanted with the state of politics in the country and feel that the two major parties are responsible.

At a moment when politicians, pundits and the political science establishment have rendered the decision of so many to be independent as meaningless and even gone as far as denying our existence, you have not only shown a light on the growth of the independent electorate, but you have looked to explore some of the reasons that so many voters are choosing to be independents.

In an article in 2021, you wrote:

“One idea that we don’t focus on very often is whether we have the proper structure to support the democracy we collectively crave...And yet, both parties have become soulless zombies of their former selves, re-animated every four years by a cult of personality that on paper appears to offer the party direction and leadership, only to collapse once that personality fades.”

in your interviews with indies in battleground states during the recent midterm elections, you documented the critical importance of listening to what independents have to say about why the country is on the wrong track.

We thank you for your courage in being ahead of the curve on the coverage of independents and hope "Meet the Press" will follow your lead and further explore the contribution and importance of independents.

New Study on Voter Attitudes About Elections

This spring, the **Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy** (CISD) at Arizona State University interviewed 1,063 of Arizona's registered voters to better understand what changes and adjustments might increase voter confidence in our election system. Their report, entitled **Consensus and Concern in Arizona's Hot Political Climate: Voter Attitudes About Elections**, speaks to the ways parties force voters to select candidates. The survey sample is divided, *pro rata*, among registered Republicans, Democrats and independents, and reflects the range of ages, ethnicities, and education of Arizona voters. The CISD is co-directed by Thom Reilly and Independent Voting President Jackie Salit.

Here are some study highlights from the survey:

- Four in five Arizona voters surveyed favor a nonpartisan primary system
- Over 90% of voters support a system where top state and local election officials would be required to take an oath to function in a nonpartisan

manner

- There was broad support for election security measures combined with the need for reforms

In an article written about the report published on [Governing.com](#), Reilly noted:

"The partisan control of election administration in the United States now serves to erode public trust and intensify partisan gamesmanship, which in turn further erodes public trust. Perhaps it is time for the U.S. to join other democracies and implement its own nonpartisan election system."

[Read the full report here](#)

Brahm Resnick, host of Arizona's popular *NBC* talk show "Square Off," interviewed Salit and Reilly about the report. Watch the interview by clicking the photo below.



Consensus and Concern in Arizona's Hot Political Climate: Voter Attitudes About Elections



ASU Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy
Arizona State University

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Politics for the People Discusses *Poverty, By America*

Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Matthew Desmond returned on July 25 to the **Politics for the People book club** to discuss his new book *Poverty, By America* with Cathy Stewart, founder of the club and Vice President for National Development of Independent Voting. "One of the things you write in the book," Stewart began, "is that 'poverty is an injury, a *taking*.'" Stewart asked Desmond to expand on why poverty is more severe in America than other western democracies.

"In a nutshell," Desmond said, "I think the answer is because we like it. We benefit from it. At the end of the day, we have to face the cold hard fact that many of us benefit from poverty unwittingly, sometimes wittingly and this book is trying to get us to divest from our neighbor's suffering."

"Poverty isn't inevitable," continued Desmond. "The biggest myth is [poverty] will always be here. Gosh, there's a lot fewer poor folks in countries with a lot less money than us."

Desmond broke down the welfare state and how it benefits the wealthier citizens in the country. "Elevating the voices and experiences of people who have first-hand experience with the sharp edges of poverty isn't just because it's the politically right thing to do, it's because you're going to expand your imagination for what is possible and what should be asked for.

In response to a question from club member Jan Wootten, he expanded on this.

"Part of my job and of any poverty abolitionist is to proudly paint a picture of what America without poverty would look like. Ending our addiction to poverty is going to cost something — but we pay a deep cost right now by our incredibly high tolerance of poverty — all this private opulence and public squalor. It's an America without poverty is a better America, it's a safer America, it's a more democratically engaged America, it's a freer America, it's an America that activates its full potential."

Hear the full discussion with Desmond below. Check out the discussion on the **Politics for the People blog** for more.



Independent Voting Endorses Final Five Voting NYC

In July, the national board of Independent Voting unanimously voted to endorse **Final Five NYC**, the effort underway to put an initiative on the 2024 New York City ballot that proposes two key election reforms:



- It would create a nonpartisan primary for all municipal elections where all candidates for an office would appear on one ballot and all voters would be able to vote regardless of political party affiliation. The top five vote getters would then appear on the general election ballot. This means that New York City's over one million independent voters would be able to vote in the primary in all municipal elections.
- The general election would be held using ranked-choice voting.

This is a version of the reform that was passed in Alaska in 2020.

Dr. Jessie Fields, who motivated the Board's vote to endorse, shared:

"We applaud Sal Albanese and the team at Final Five NYC for taking on the arduous task of putting Final Five voting before the voters and working to build a movement across the city. Key for us at Independent Voting is that this reform would bring the over one million independent voters from the diverse communities of the city fully into the election process. There are almost double the number of independents in New York City than Republicans, yet independents have been locked out of the primaries, where almost all elections in the city are determined."



Dr. Jessie Fields

"The endorsement of Final Five by IndependentVoting.org is very important to our effort in New York City. Independent Voting has been in the forefront of reforming our voting system for years, so the support lends credibility and prestige to our campaign," said Sal Albanese, Chair of New Yorkers for Competitive Elections



Sal Albanese

Happy Birthday, Forward!

The Forward Party is one year old, and celebrated its birthday with a virtual event. Founded by Andrew Yang, former Governor of New Jersey Christine Todd Whitman and leaders of the Serve America Movement, the leaders of the Forward Party are working to build a new kind of party centered on political reform and democracy.



Open Primaries Initiative on the Way in Arizona



Thanks to Sarah Smallhouse for this report:

Save Democracy, an Arizona nonprofit focused on making our election system fairer, is soon to pivot into campaign mode. The group is behind a proposed citizens' initiative that establishes a nonpartisan open primary for all public offices, eliminates public funding for party primaries, and prohibits public funding of the presidential preference election unless independents and unaffiliated voters may also participate. The impact of these changes for people who are registered independents or are unaffiliated voters will be enormous. The current system has barriers for both voters and candidates who are not members of the two dominant parties, and it is fundamentally unfair. The open primaries initiative will require all voters be treated the same and establish a system where *every* voter can participate in *every* election. It will end preferential treatment of the two dominant political parties in selecting who gets to compete in the general election.

Sarah Smallhouse, one of the co-chairs of this effort said, "Arizona now has more independent and unaffiliated voters than any other category – including Republicans and Democrats. The current primary election system discriminates against these voters and candidates in a variety of ways – it is not fair and must be changed. Furthermore, taxpayers should not fund partisan primaries in which only small percentages of party loyalists select the general election candidates we all must choose between. Arizonans deserve better choices. We have an established

procedure to amend our constitution to fit the times, now is the time to utilize that power.”

The initiative will require petition signatures to qualify for the November 2024 ballot. Stand by for an announcement later this summer. Volunteer signature collectors wanted!

Read "**Open Primaries proposal won't require ranked choice voting, but opens the door**" (*Axios*) and "**Arizona group seeks to outlaw partisan primary elections**" (*Arizona Capital Times*) for more.

Florida: Closing the Loophole

Florida Open Primaries, a coalition of local and national activists, has launched a campaign to document the full extent that write-in candidates have been used to trigger a closed primary election in the state, and pressure the legislature to close the write-in loophole.

Steve Hough, chair of Florida Fair and Open Primaries and a leading independent in the campaign broke down the campaign for *The Hub*:



Steve Hough

In 1998, Florida voters overwhelmingly approved a state constitutional amendment which provided for a universal open primary in situations when only one party fielded candidates and there would be no opposition in the general election. That's only fair, right? At a time when 50% was still the threshold for approval, 64% of voters agreed.

Since that time, candidates from both parties have enlisted bogus write-in candidates to pose as token opposition to keep primaries that should have been open to all voters closed. It's a fraud, but perfectly legal.

Flagrant circumvention of the will of voters should be abhorrent to any fair-minded person.

As such, we have partnered with **Open Primaries** to bring attention to this persistent method of disenfranchising voters, and we are reaching out to our networks asking independent-minded voters to join us in an appeal to state legislators. We are asking our representatives to stand against those in both parties using the write-in loophole to keep primaries closed that would otherwise be open to all voters. It happens all too often, and it needs to stop.

Since 2020, 8.2 million Florida voters have been denied a voice in selecting their representatives in 114 congressional and state legislative races. Democrats have used the write-in loophole more often, while Republicans have disenfranchised far more voters.

In the first month of our campaign, 475 letters were sent and 88% of representatives received at least one letter. The office of one state senator has reached out for more information, and our next goal is to reach 100% of representatives with 1,000 letters sent by August 15.

If you live in Florida, you can help by sending a message to your state representatives in one easy step. Our friends at Open Primaries have provided the research and [a convenient link](#) to do so. It takes less than one minute. Please add your support and tell your friends and family about our campaign. Thank you.

[Watch this NBC news piece which features Open Primaries President John Opdycke](#) or [read this piece](#) on the *Independent Voter Network* for more.

Update on Washington DC's Ballot Initiative 83

Thanks to Lisa Rice, political strategist, DC Ward 7 ANC commissioner and leader of the Make All Votes Count campaign, for this report:

Last month, on Friday, July 21, the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE) **unanimously voted** that the Make All Votes Count Act of 2024 is "proper subject matter," which means it is officially **Ballot Initiative #83**!



Lisa Rice and Philip Panell

This is the beginning of a long, multi-pronged process to bring this to the ballot box for Washingtonians to vote on. Between now and when we begin collecting signatures needed to gain ballot access, there are several administrative milestones ahead of the campaign.

Next the DCBOE will need to (1) finalize the Short Title (currently "**Make All Votes Count Act of 2024**" but it could be changed); (2) create the 100 word-or-less Summary Statement, which will appear on petitions and on ballots, and (3) draft the final version of the Legislative Text, which will ultimately become the new law in the DC Code. We expect the drafting to wrap up in the next couple weeks.

The final step is a special hearing in which the DCBOE will vote to adopt the final version of Ballot Initiative 83. After the hearing and the adopted version is published in the DC Register, there is a 10-day challenge period. During that time period, any DC voter can sue the DCBOE to prevent the ballot measure from going forward. This challenge period is when we expect opposition may try to derail our efforts in D.C Superior Court.

Once we pass that final hurdle, we'll work closely with the DCBOE to formulate the official ballot access petition. We will present the ballot access petition, also known as the circulating petition, at a public hearing and we'll adopt the circulating petition as our own. We'll then have 180 days to collect signatures from 5% of the registered DC voters in at least five of the eight wards. Based on the current voter roll of 527,029 registered DC voters, we'll need to collect 26,351 valid signatures to achieve ballot access.

In summary, last month's historic Board of Elections vote means the campaign has several months to go before Ballot Initiative 83 really kicks off. That gives us a ton of time to really build a true grassroots campaign that's ready and able to transform DC's electoral processes. We welcome your **volunteer energy** and **financial support**.

Taking Applications for the Next Spokesperson Training

Have you ever tried to explain to a friend why you are an independent, but were not sure how?

Have you ever watched a news program where the host acts as if every American is a Democrat or Republican and felt angry and left out?

If you answered YES, register today to reserve your spot at Independent Voting's Spokesperson Training Program.

Part educational, part performance training. Every independent has a story to tell about why he/she became independent. Join our Spokesperson Training to increase your skills and comfort in telling your story!

SPOKESPERSON TRAINING

FREE YOUR VOICE, BE INDEPENDENT

Register Here:



Our next spokesperson training will be
October 16 at 6:30pm

If you'd like to apply for the upcoming training,
fill out and submit an application today.

Kathy Ramsey, Alamogordo, New Mexico:

This training allowed me to improve my message in educating about independent voting and underscored how important using our stories is in claiming our power in impacting meaningful change.



Apply for the next spokesperson training here!

Profiles in Independence

Reverend Mareo Johnson

Tulsa, Oklahoma



Rev. Mareo Johnson

My name is Reverend Mareo Johnson. I'm a native of Tulsa, where I was born and have spent the majority of my life. Early in life, I made some wrong choices that I deeply regret, but I've learned a lot in the process and through the transition of my life. In 2009 I became the change to bring the change, with a vision to try to make the world a better place for us all.

Most of my life I've always had a passion for ministry and politics, and I would always pay attention to what is going on in the world of politics. In 2009, my political journey officially began — I became a part of different organizations and committees. In 2016 I became the leading founder and Executive Director of the Tulsa chapter of Black Lives Matter. From there, I became a mayoral appointee to the Sales Tax Overview Committee for the City of Tulsa. Things that are extremely important to me are the safety of the public, healthy families, education and equity, economic development and growth, homelessness and hunger, criminal justice reform, health and wellness, and police and community relations just to name a few. These things are not just locally important to me but nationally and internationally important to me as well. I became an independent mainly because I want to have the freedom to cross party lines based on humanitarianism. I come with a message of Love and Unity.

In the News

Read this editorial by Joe E. Pickering, Jr., founder of Mainers for Open Elections Jeremy Gruber, Senior Vice President of Open Primaries, "**Maine's primary elections need further reform to truly be open.**" (*Bangor Daily News*)

Idahoans for Open Primaries have challenged the Attorney General's use of a misleading title on their ballot initiative. Read "**Idaho open primary supporters legally challenge AG Raúl Labrador's ballot titles**" about the legal challenge and "**New coalition starts initiative to open primary.**" (*Idaho Capitol Sun*)

People4Utah will soon launch a 2024 ballot measure to adopt nonpartisan primaries. Read Robert Gehrke's opinion piece, "**Here's how we fix Utah's broken, unrepresentative primary election system.**" (*The Salt Lake Tribune*)

Read "**Nonpartisans now make up the largest group of Nevada voters. What does it mean?**" (*The Nevada Independent*)

Read "**Nearly Half of Voters would consider a third-party candidate over Trump/Biden: Poll**" (*New York Post*)

No Labels founder Nancy Jacobson penned this opinion piece in June, "**Democrats and Republicans met to subvert a third-party option. So much for caring about what voters want.**" (*LA Times*)

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