

August, 2013

To: The Members of the Commission on Election Administration
From: Catana L Barnes, President, Independent Voters of Nevada
RE: Statement for Public Comment

Dear Members,

My name is Catana L Barnes; I am the founder and president of Independent Voters of Nevada. We represent the 251,462 voters (18 percent of the electorate) in Nevada who are registered to vote as independents. I am also here to present statements from independent leaders from Arizona, California, Oregon and Utah as they could not be here today to present their statements to you personally.

Independents are independents for specific reasons. We don't like the gridlock created by party ideologies and we don't want to be controlled by a party. However, because election administration is organized along bipartisan lines, we face barriers which prevent us from fully participating.

In Nevada, independents are subject to a designation by election administrators as "nonpartisans". There are many states in fact where independents are not able to register simply as independent. Instead, election administrators call them "undeclared" "unaffiliated," "declined to state" and "other". This nomenclature reflects the partisan bias of that runs throughout the election administration systems nationwide.

Independents, who again comprise 18% of the electorate in Nevada, are excluded from voting in the primary elections because, like 18 other states, our primary elections are closed to any voter who is not a Democrat or a Republican. This is despite the fact our tax dollars contribute to funding the primary elections. This is unacceptable.

In addition, independents in Nevada and in other states do not receive timely information about the elections or voting rights. In Nevada, the sample ballot independents receive before the primary elections does not contain any information about any candidates other than those running for nonpartisan offices and the sample ballot for the general election arrives just three weeks before the election. This system puts independents at a disadvantage to make an informed decision.

It is apparent the President created this Commission to, "...promote the efficient administration of Federal Elections and to improve the experience of all voters." The President also stated, "...That includes our most fundamental right as citizens: the right to vote. When any American, no matter where they live or what their party, are denied that right...we are betraying our ideals..."

While soliciting input from my fellow leaders of independent organizations, I was reminded about the reasons why I am an independent voter and why I am here today. The independent leaders from Arizona, California, Oregon and Utah wrote their own letters to present to the commission and each one made very important points about the ways independent voters are disenfranchised.

I want to underscore the following:

From Brenda Sperduti of Arizona

· “The issues the Presidential Commission on Elections should address , in addition to those in your basic mandate, are those that continue to disenfranchise over one-third of Arizona voters. ...Specifically why independents are forced to choose one of the two major party ballots in order to participate in citizen-funded primary elections...Independent voters should be afforded the same rights as partisan voters to participate in our American elections system...”

From Dave Ellis of Oregon

· “Our current electoral system seems built on a nineteenth-century model. Despite its flaws, it functioned more or less well through much of the twentieth century. But the changes in American society and politics over the last 20 years have clearly demonstrated that those flaws have become increasingly fatal flaws. We now have a system that is more dysfunctional than functional, with growing numbers of citizens and voters who feel marginalized and alienated. ...”

From Randy Miller of Utah

· “My particular party preference is no party, and I am joined in this preference by a majority of voters here in Utah (over 42%) who have declined to affiliate with a party. Unfortunately, this means that in primary elections, independent voters will receive a severely abridged ballot unless we consent to affiliate with a private organization; one of the political parties. And even if we were to change our voter affiliation (which most of us are loathe to do) our ballot would still be abridged to reflect the candidates of a single party only. This is unreasonable. It is un-American. And it could easily be construed as unconstitutional.”

From Jason Olson of California

· “Our organization helped pass a top-two non-partisan election system and two redistricting reform measures that went into effect for the 2012 election. Independents - the fastest growing segment of the electorate in California for over 20 years - had the right to participate fully and equally.”

From Janelle Woods of Arizona

· “The current electorate you serve has greatly changed over the past several years ... with this in mind I implore you as a U.S. citizen, as a registered independent voter, to carefully consider how independents have been impeded from exercising our rights to vote in all election cycles...”

It is apparent that independent voters, despite being 40% of the electorate nationwide, are dismissed as second-class citizens and denied equality in the political process. I am here today because I want to inform the Commission about the inequities independents face. I hope the Commission will consider doing something to change those inequalities so the electoral system is one that is equal for all voters.

Thank you for your serious consideration of these issues.