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Portland, Oregon 97212  
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Presidential Commission on Election Administration

I have been working for many years in Oregon to improve the ability of independent voters to be fully engaged in the electoral process. Over the past 20 years, the number of Oregon voters not registered with either major political party has increased from 20 to 30%. Recent data have indicated that many of those abandoning the major parties are young, disenfranchised voters.

Our current electoral system seems built on a nineteenth-century model. Despite its flaws, it functioned more or less well through much of twentieth century. But the changes in American society and politics over the past 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. The outcome of many elections is now in the hands of a small minority of voters, which discourages many from continuing to participate.

Independent voters are major victims of the failures of the current system. In many states, they are treated as second-class citizens, disenfranchised from the selection of candidates and allowed to participate only in the final stage of the electoral process. I understand the rationale that political parties, whether major or minor, should be allowed to limit the participation of only those registered as party members in their primaries. But should taxpayers be liable for the costs for what are in essence private elections, and why are independent voters forced to choose only among candidates chosen by others?

The Commission has a rare opportunity for a comprehensive examination of our current system and to develop recommendations for a fundamental restructuring of that system. That restructuring must include real opportunities for independent voters to become fully engaged in the electoral process. The time is absolutely right for change. You can either manage that change or let the change manage you.

Thank you.



David V. Ellis