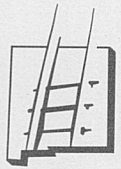


# THINK NEW MEXICO

A Results-Oriented Think Tank Serving New Mexicans

Please visit our website at [www.thinknewmexico.org](http://www.thinknewmexico.org)



April 24, 2013

## Via E-mail and Regular Mail

John Billingsley  
Chair, Republican Party of New Mexico  
405 Fort Stanton  
Alto, NM 88312  
[john.pb45@gmail.com](mailto:john.pb45@gmail.com)

Javier Gonzales  
Chair, Democratic Party of New Mexico  
3200 Monte Vista NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106  
[Javiermgonzales@gmail.com](mailto:Javiermgonzales@gmail.com)

Dear Mr. Billingsley and Mr. Gonzales:

As Chairmen of the Democratic and Republican Parties of New Mexico, I am writing to urge you to use your upcoming state conventions to encourage your respective parties to change your party rules to allow open primaries so that Independents can vote in those elections.

There are 230,839 New Mexicans who are registered as Independents (technically, Decline to State), according to the Secretary of State's New Mexico Voter Registration Statistics Report of March 28, 2013. These Independents represent about 18% of New Mexico voters or nearly one out of every five registered voters in New Mexico.

The ranks of Independent voters continue to grow rapidly. As recently as 1984, only six percent of registered voters in New Mexico were Independents. Thus, the percentage of Independents in New Mexico has tripled in less than three decades.

Younger voters are the single biggest factor in the growth of Independents in New Mexico. Data from state voter files "show that young people between 18 and 30 are more than twice as likely, at about 25%, to decline to state a party when registering than people older than 60, among whom the figure is about 10% or lower," according to an October 16, 2011 article in the *Albuquerque Journal* entitled, "Independents Changing the Political Landscape."

Meanwhile, more and more rank and file Democrats and Republicans are losing interest in voting in the current closed primaries. In the 2008 primary, turnout in New Mexico was 31%. In the 2010 primary, turnout was 28%. In 2012 primary turnout fell to 24%.

Some may argue that New Mexico's election code does not allow Independents to vote in primaries, although the language of our statutes does not explicitly disallow them from doing so. (As I read it, the statute simply prohibits Democrats from voting in Republican primaries and vice versa). In any case, the controlling authority is the United States Supreme Court, which in *Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut* held that it

1227 Paseo de Peralta  
Santa Fe, NM 87501  
Tel: 505.992.1315  
Fax: 505.992.1314  
[info@thinknewmexico.org](mailto:info@thinknewmexico.org)

Board of Directors:  
Garrey Carruthers Chair  
Roberta Cooper Ramo  
Vice-Chair

Clara Apodaca  
Paul Bardacke  
David Buchholtz  
LaDonna Harris  
Susan Herter  
Edward Lujan  
Fred Nathan

Lyme Loucks Buchen  
Business Manager

Jason A. Espinoza  
Field Director

Kristina G. Fisher  
Associate Director

Fred Nathan  
Founder and  
Executive Director

is unconstitutional for a state to mandate closed primaries. The court said in essence that a state cannot stop a party from opening its primary to unaffiliated or Independent voters.

There are many advantages for political parties that create a more inclusive primary system. This is why, in most states, Independents are allowed to vote in primary elections either through open primaries (i.e., voters of any affiliation may vote in the primary of any party) or semi-open primaries (i.e., voters registered with a party vote in their party's primary, while Independent voters may choose a party primary to vote in).

Ending the closed primary system will lead to greater voter participation in New Mexico. When Arizona voters passed a constitutional amendment (by more than 20 percent) in 1998 to move from a closed to semi-open primary system, the new semi-open primaries increased voter turnout in primary elections from 19.6% of registered voters in 1998 to 24% in 2000 to 30% in 2010.

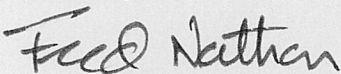
In addition, ending the closed primary system will increase the accountability of our elected officials by giving more voters the opportunity to vet the candidates on the front end. As you know, many New Mexico elections are essentially decided during the primary, so opening the primaries to more voters will ultimately result in elected officials who represent the perspectives of more of their constituents. For the same reason, open primaries or semi-open primaries would also decrease the polarization of candidates in both parties.

Moreover, by including and listening to Independent voters, you will better position your party to win in the General Election. Since Independents often comprise the deciding swing votes in close elections, gaining their support early could make the difference in many elections. So there will be an advantage to whichever party moves first to open its primaries.

I urge you both to take action at your upcoming party conventions to open your closed primaries for the 2014 elections. This basic reform will increase voter participation and candidate accountability. It is in the interest of both of your parties. It is also the right thing to do. After all, taxes paid by registered Independents help pay for primary elections, yet Independents are not permitted to vote in them. And as the *Albuquerque Journal* noted in an editorial in January of this year, "pledging allegiance to party ideology should not be a requirement to exercise the right to vote."

Please call me at (505) 992-1315 if I can be of assistance to you in this endeavor or if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Fred Nathan

Founder and Executive Director  
(and Registered Independent)