



VETERANS for POLITICAL INNOVATION

Inspiring Veterans to Advocate & *Mobilize* for Powerful Political Reforms

April 8, 2021

RE: Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 231 from Veterans for Political Innovation

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and Members of the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee,

We are writing today to offer testimony in support of LD 231, “An Act to Establish Open Primaries,” in Maine. We are all veterans of the military, or civil service, and we are leaders and Advisory Board Members of “Veterans for Political Innovation” (VPI). VPI is a new, fiercely cross-partisan, nationwide community to inspire veterans to continue their service by mobilizing and advocating for targeted electoral reforms. We are Republicans and Democrats, and VPI’s Founder, Eric Bronner, is an independent (unaffiliated) voter.

Closed primaries are used by only 14 states. Maine’s current, closed primary system prevents unaffiliated (independent) voters from participating in, arguably, the most important election in our democratic process. For this reason, closed primaries have been called, “the biggest form of voter suppression that there is in this country.” And, because primary elections are publicly funded, this is a modern example of taxation without the ability for an unaffiliated voter to choose their preferred representation. This is fundamentally unfair, especially for Maine’s veterans.

According to the Census Bureau, Maine has one of the highest veteran populations, per capita, of any state in the Union. Approximately one out of every ten (or about 140,000) Mainers are veterans. Nationwide, some polls show that as many as 49% of all veterans self-identify or are registered as unaffiliated (independent) voters. This means that Maine’s current closed primary system likely disenfranchises over 60,000 unaffiliated Maine veterans. This is unacceptable.

Veterans put their lives in harm’s way, in part, to ensure that our democratic Republic survives and thrives. There are American veterans who risked life and limb to administer elections in foreign countries who cannot participate in their own elections, back home, if they happen to be an unaffiliated voter living in a closed primary state like Maine. This is not only undemocratic, it is unconscionable.

Lastly, closed primaries further unnecessary political divisions and fuel partisan extremism—both growing threats to the health of our states and our Union. In our electoral process, far too many general elections are uncompetitive. This means that, in many cases, the primary election is the only election of consequence. And, because of low voter turnout in the primaries, a very small percentage of voters ends-up deciding the outcome. Once again, unaffiliated Maine veterans—a potential moderating or unifying force—are completely left out of the critical primary process.



VETERANS for POLITICAL INNOVATION

Every veteran has sworn a sacred oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic. We did not swear an oath to a political leader or a private political party. Please give unaffiliated Maine veterans the opportunity to participate in every aspect of the democratic process that they risked their lives to defend.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, we urge you to support LD 231.

Signed by the following Members of Veterans for Political Innovation (VPI):

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