

April 6, 2021
Sen. Luchini
Rep. Caiazzo
Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

Re: Testimony in support of LD 231, "An Act to Establish Open Primaries."

Dear Sen. Luchini, Rep. Caiazzo, and Committee Members:

My name is Tom Waddell, I live in Litchfield, Maine, and I am testifying in support of LD 231

After the last election, it seems the losing party took voter suppression to a new and dangerous level in several states instead of listening to the people and becoming more inclusive. Fortunately, the Maine Legislature is discussing an inclusive measure to reduce voter suppression. LD 231, an act that combats voter suppression, lets independents vote in one partisan primary. Voting for enrolled Republicans and Democrats remains the same. At first glance, it seems counter-intuitive for those not enrolled to decide who will represent a party in the general election.

Fair enough, but then first glances do not reveal everything that needs consideration when making changes to our election laws. Looking a little deeper, one sees inconsistencies that beg several questions; Who pays for elections? What part do partisan primaries play in the complete election process? What voting limits are consistent with electing candidates who represent most voters, "the" hallmark of a democracy?

Everyone's taxes fund primary elections, but independent voters receive no benefit from the taxes they pay for primary elections. An impartial law would require political parties to finance their primaries or allow everyone with the Constitutional right to vote to participate.

That is an obvious argument, but a more nuanced perspective recognizes primary elections are the first election in a two-election process that elects political candidates. Suppose political parties paid for their primaries. Excluding independents would still be suppressing their Constitutional right to vote in the complete election process.

LD 231 will increase voter turnout. Because most voters are moderates, more moderates from both parties will be elected when more people registered to vote get to vote. We need state and national leaders who recognize the other party's good intent and work to create fair and equitable laws. As the voting population increases, democracy and the people win. Restricting primary voting to the party faithful allows divisive partisan politics to prevail.

Opposition to increasing voter turnout is part of a nationwide effort of voter suppression. The Federalist Society, the Heritage Foundation, and ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, are leaders in the national effort to suppress votes. Paul Weyrich founded these organizations based on voter suppression.

In 1980, Weyrich spoke to 15,000 Christian conservatives and said, "Now, many of our Christians have what I call the "goo-goo" syndrome. Good Government. They want everybody to vote. I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of people. They never have been from the beginning of our country, and they are not now. As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down." https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Interesting_ALEC_Quotes

To combat national voter suppression, the House passed HR1, the "For the People Act of 2021". The act will increase voter turnout by making it easier for registered voters to vote. Regardless of party, restricting primary voting to the party faithful allows divisive partisan politics to prevail.

Creating semi-open primaries in Maine will increase voter turnout, restore faith in the election system, and give all parties an even chance at winning elections. Any party opposition to increasing voter turnout will be the last gasp of a dying political party.

Thank you,

Tom Waddell
Litchfield, Maine
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