

To: Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

From: William Weber, MEng., retired

Date: April 9, 2021

Subject: Public Testimony In Support of LD 231, An Act To Establish Open Primaries

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I am William Weber, a longtime resident of Portland, Maine, and an enthusiastic voter. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today in support of LD 231, An Act To Establish Open Primaries.

I am passionate about voting and I have not missed a local, state, or federal election in over 30 years. As a volunteer with AARP in the last election cycle our team worked tirelessly with Town Clerks and municipal officials around the state to inform our membership of how to stay safe and make their votes count during the pandemic.

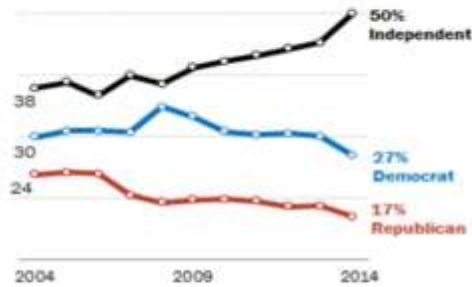
I believe voting is one of the most important responsibilities a citizen has in a democracy. I would like every citizen to have the same determination and passion to make their voice heard. But unfortunately, a large percentage of registered voters in Maine who are unenrolled are barred from an important aspect of selecting our candidates in the party primaries. Regrettably, Maine typically has low voter turnout in our primaries, which means that fewer and fewer Mainers are actually deciding on who the candidates will be.

I was immensely proud of our new Secretary of State, Shenna Bellows, when she testified to Congress earlier this year on the best practices that Maine has adopted to lower barriers to citizen voting. But Maine could do so much better by allowing roughly a third of our registered voters who are unenrolled to participate in the selection process of the major candidates. Maine is definitely on the wrong side of this issue and is part of a small minority of states that do not allow unenrolled registered voters to cast a ballot in the primaries.

As Maine starts to adopt Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), the number of millennials that identify as independent or unenrolled will increase. The below chart is excerpted from a Pew Research study on the increasing number of millennials across the country who have registered as independent.

Millennials Increasingly Identify as Political Independents

% of Millennials who identify as ...



Source: Data points represent totals based on all Pew Research surveys of the general public conducted in that calendar year

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- **Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) will increase the percentage of unenrolled registered voters.**
- **When Oregon enacted AVR in 2019, 80% of new voters registered unenrolled.**

LD 231 – An Act To Establish Open Primaries

Sponsor: Senator Chloe Maxmin

OpenPrimariesMaine.com

As I've grown older and perhaps wiser, I have become increasingly partisan, and up until a few years ago I was against allowing nonparty members to cast votes in our party primaries. But as our main political parties have drifted further apart ideologically, it is clear that the independent voter plays a large role in determining the ultimate winner. Therefore, it does not make sense to exclude unenrolled registered voters from the candidate selection process. Both parties would benefit from having stronger candidates that appeal to the broader base of voters and not to the fringe elements in their party.

Today, our nation is at a critical station where our democracy is threatened, where our elected leaders are attempting to choose their voters rather than the voters choosing the elected leaders. Maine can do the right thing and end the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of Mainers in the candidate selection process by enacting LD 231.

Thank you.