

# *Unaffiliated Voters*

**If You can't Beat Them- Join Them- and  
Then Beat Them.**





# ***EVOLUTION***

In 1776 the United States was led by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin.

In 2023, the United States is led by Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Mitch McConnell, Kamala Harris, Kevin McCarthy, AOC, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Kari Lake and Gavin Newsome, proving decisively

- **DARWIN WAS WRONG**

Our species, or at least our government- is not evolving.

## *We Deserve Better*

Our political system is broken.

- The two parties have formed a duopoly where Democrats run to the left and Republicans run to the right.
- There are almost no moderates and no bipartisanship.
- Joe Biden's approval rating is 36%\*
- Donald Trump's approval rating is 45%\*
- 70% of voters do not want Biden to run for reelection while 60% do not want Trump to run.\*\*
- Congress's approval rating is 20% with 78% disapproving.\*\*\*

**We deserve better than this.**

# *REN Wants to Change the System*

Reform Elections Now wants to change the election system. We favor

- Opening Primaries to all voters.
- Top 2 Non-partisan primaries and Ranked Choice Voting, which promote allows moderates to run and win and all voters to have a say.
- Independent commissions to end Gerrymandering, and
- Better voting systems that promote ease of voting with more security.

# *If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them, and then Beat Them*

Most Americans agree with our positions.

- We are making substantial inroads in changing the system. More states and cities are adopting systems with which we agree. It will take time, but we will succeed.
- However, in the short term, people who are dissatisfied with the system can have an impact by participating in the political system rather than carping and walking away.
- As the saying goes-

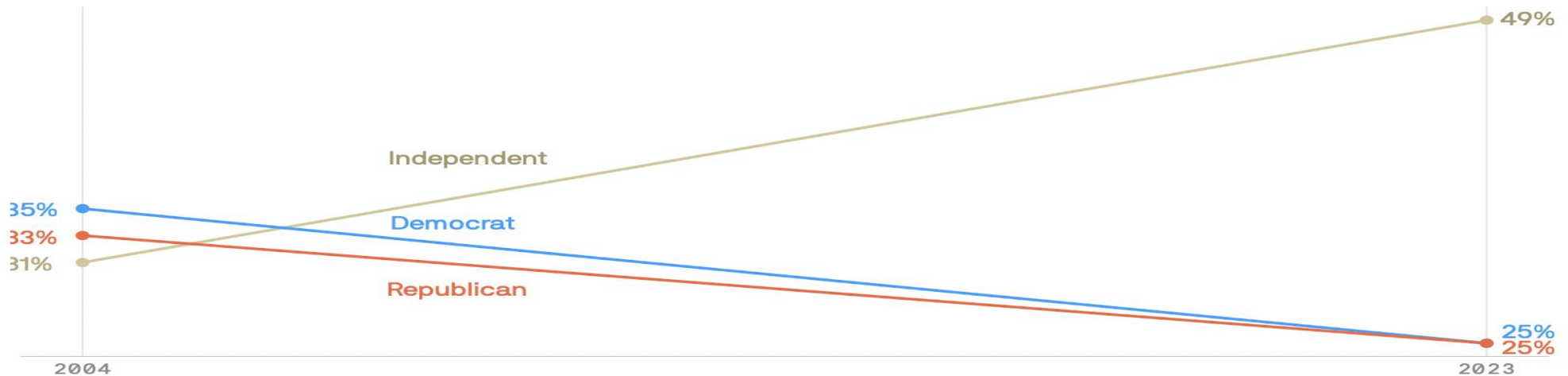
**“If you can't beat them- join them- and then beat them.”**

# *Unaffiliated Voters Are Almost in the Majority*

According to a recent Gallup Polls, 49% of all voters now consider themselves to be independent up from 31% in 2004. During the same period, Democrats have dropped from 35% to 25% and Republicans have dropped from 33% to 25%. Yet while they are the largest group, independents almost never have anyone for whom to vote.

## Share of U.S. adults who identify with select political affiliations

Surveys of at least 1,000 U.S. adults conducted March 2004 and March 2023



Data: [Gallup](#); Chart: Tory Lysik/Axios Visuals

# *Independent or Unaffiliated Registration is Soaring.*

From 2000 to 2022, in the 31 states that kept track of party registration, Democratic registration increased 27.9%, Republican registration increased 26.3%. Independent registration increased 62.0%, and independent and other registration increased 89.4%.\* (Independent registration includes unaffiliated voters. Other includes third parties, including parties called “independent.”)

	Registration 2022 & 2000				
	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Ind.+other
2022	49,285,839	36,386,591	30,786,424	6,373,014	37,159,438
2000	38,529,839	28,813,511	18,999,126	621,888	19,621,014
change	27.9%	26.3%	62.0%	924.8%	89.4%

\*Ballotpedia

## *Some of the Numbers Are Obscure*

- Unfortunately, 19 states do not indicate partisan affiliations or report registration numbers publicly, so there is no effective way of tracking a voters' allegiance except through polls.
  - In Ohio, for example, a voter must designate a party in order to vote in a primary, but only those voters who voted in the primary are listed as members of the party. According to the Secretary of State of Ohio, party registration was as follows:

### Ohio Voters

• Democrats	Republicans	Libertarians	Unaffiliated	Total
• 947,027	836,080	2,847	6,196,547	7,982,501
• 11.9%	10.5%	0.0%	77.6%	

The only things these numbers tell us is that 22.4% of people voted in primaries.

**Despite the lack of numbers from 19 states, the swing to unaffiliated or independent voters is dramatic and nationwide.**



# *North Carolina*

North Carolina is a swing state that has elected both Republicans and Democrats. Its numbers are typical of many states.

	Rep.	Dem.	Unaffiliated
Jan 2022	30.2%	34.1%	35.1%
Jan 2004	34.5%	47.6%	17.7%

In 2004, unaffiliated voters made up 17.7% of the electorate. By 2022, their share had almost doubled while those of Republicans and Democrats had dropped.

One of the reasons for the sharp increase in North Carolina is that the state went from closed to semi-closed primaries. This enabled independents to select the primary in which they wanted to vote.

Before considering other states, let's try to understand the identity and politics of unaffiliated voters.

## *Who Are Unaffiliated Voters?*

**The Gallup Poll on slide 6 indicated 49% of all voters consider themselves “independent.” A 2018 survey by Pew Research pegged the number at 38%.**

- It is clear that the number of “independent” or “unaffiliated” voters are growing rapidly.

**Yet most of the voters who consider themselves independent or register as unaffiliated actually lean toward one party or another.**

- According to the Research from Pew:
  - 81% of all independents “lean” to one of the parties. The percentage of “leaners” in each state is roughly divided the same way as the percentage of voters in the same state.
  - Only 19% of unaffiliated voters or 7% of all Americans are truly neutral.

**Independents who lean toward a party are more moderate than those who affiliate with the same party.**

- 43% describe their political views as moderate .
- Independents who lean toward a party are less likely than partisans to view their party favorably.
- More independents (28%) than Republicans (10%) or Democrats (9%) have an unfavorable opinion of *both* parties.

# Unaffiliated Voters Vote Less Often

- **Independents are younger than the average voter.**
- **Independents also tend to vote less often.**
  - On an average leaners voted 51% of the time compared to 60% for party registrants.
  - Those who did not lean to a party only voted 33% of the time.
- Because most states do not provide numbers, it is difficult to accurately estimate the participation of unaffiliated voters except through polling. However:
  - According to the Associated Press, in the 2022 election in New York state, Republican turnout was 63%. Democratic turnout was 47%, and unaffiliated turnout was 37%. \*
  - In Arizona, according to the Arizona Mirror, by the day before the 2022 election, 46% of Democrats, 39% of Republicans, and 26% of unaffiliated persons had voted.\*\*

\* Joshua Solomon, Alexandra Harris, Nov. 28, 2022 \*\* .CAITLIN SIEVERS - NOVEMBER 8, 2022

# Unaffiliated Voters & Primary Elections

Since everyone can vote in the general election, the biggest impediment to unaffiliated voters comes in primary elections. Some of these elections are more restrictive than others.

- **Non-partisan Primaries: No Issue:**
  - Alaska, California, Nebraska (state offices only), and Washington State have top 2 or top 4 non-partisan primaries, so party does not matter. Louisiana has a two-stage non-partisan system, where party also does not matter.
- **Open Primaries: No Issue-Except when states want to eliminate them.**
  - Arkansas, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, South Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin have open primaries in which anyone can participate.
- **Semi-Closed Primaries: Minor Issues**
  - Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska (Federal offices Only), New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma (Democrats only), Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and West Virginia have semi-closed primaries, where basically anyone can vote, but they have to register with one party before voting. This is a minor, but real impediment to independent voters who often feel uncomfortable aligning with a party.

# *Unaffiliated Voters & Primary Elections*

- **Semi-Open Primaries: Minor Issue:**
  - Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wyoming have open primaries, but since the parties can set voting rules, they are better described as semi-open. These primaries present a minor impediment to independents.
- **Closed Primaries: Major Issues**
  - Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma (Republicans only), Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah (Republicans only), and Washington D.C. have closed primaries in which only members of the party can vote and in which there are major impediments to unaffiliated voters changing parties at the last minute.

**In closed primary states, unaffiliated voters cannot vote in primaries.**

- **By excluding unaffiliated voters, who are more moderate, the primaries become weighted towards the bases of each party. A high percentage of the candidates nominated are those that appeal to their bases and moderates are often excluded or defeated.**

# The Importance of Primaries

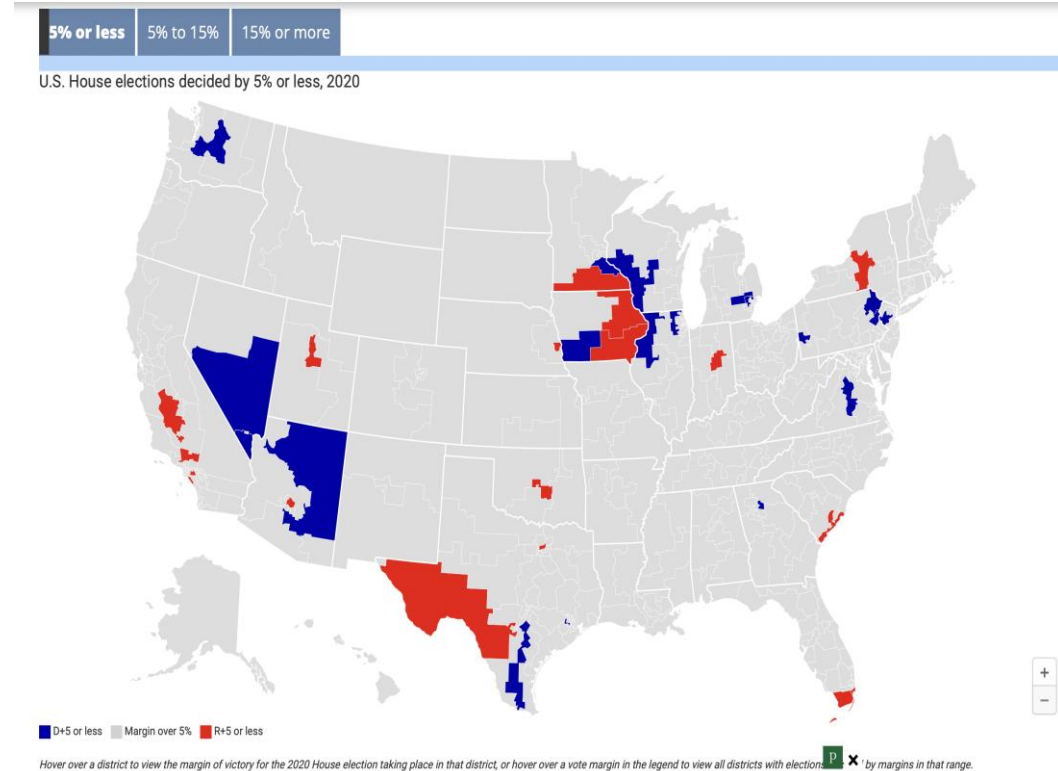
In this time of high polarization and Gerrymandering, primaries are often the only chance a voter has to make a difference.

Most final elections are not competitive.

- 2020 Congressional elections decided by 5% or less are marked in red and blue. It is striking how few there are.
- With little competition in the final election, the winning candidates were those selected in the primaries.

In the primaries, each of the parties tends to nominate those candidates that appeal to their bases rather than to the majority of the electorate.

- As a result, there is often a progressive Democrat running against a Conservative Republican, leaving the middle without representation.



# Unaffiliated Voters in Closed Primary States Can Regain Their Rights

Unaffiliated voters in closed primary states cede their right to help select the candidates going into the general election.

**Yet unaffiliated voters can reclaim their power if they take the simple step of registering with the party to which they lean or registering with the party that has the most interesting or competitive primary.**

**This may sound like a waste of time, but as you will see on the next few slides, it could have a significant impact on U.S. politics.**

# Florida

Florida is a closed primary state.

- From 1995-2022, registered voters increased 130.9%
- Republicans increased 99.9% & Democrats 60.5%
- Unaffiliated voters increased 675.7% and other increased 444.7%.
- Unaffiliated voters went from 8.3% to 27.7%.
- While still smaller than Republicans or Democrats, there are now more than 4 million unaffiliated voters in Florida that do not participate in primaries.

	Florida		Statistics	1995-2022	
	Registration	Registration		Other	Unaffiliated
	Rep.	Dem.	Other	Unaffiliated	
<b>2022</b>	5,312,122	4,928,168	263,790	4,032,731	14,536,811
2015	4,182,825	4,619,319	355,289	2,831,524	11,988,957
2010	3,973,772	4,695,338	353,725	2,114,837	11,137,672
2005	3,957,839	4,314,023	304,140	1,897,837	10,473,839
2000	3,279,838	3,672,332	152,555	1,186,270	8,290,995
1995	2,657,385	3,069,793	48,427	519,890	6,295,495
% change	99.9%	60.5%	444.7%	675.7%	130.9%
Current Percentage	36.5%	33.9%	1.8%	27.7%	
Percentage 1995	42.2%	48.8%	0.8%	8.3%	



# Florida-Governor 2018

If unaffiliated voters had registered with the party to which they leaned, Ron DeSantis might never have been elected and the culture in Florida on things like abortion rights, might be entirely different.

- In 2018, Ron DeSantis defeated Andrew Gillum in the election for Governor by 32,463 votes out of a total of 8,220,561, or less than 0.4%.
  - Ron DeSantis  
4,076,186
  - Andrew Gillum  
4,043,723
- There were also 100,652 third party votes, many of which likely would have gone to Gillum. In fact, people who voted for independent candidates likely gave the election to DeSantis.
- Gillum was a flawed candidate. He was on the left of the Democratic party, supporting increases in taxes and restrictions on guns. Republicans referred to his platform as “far left socialist.” He was endorsed by Bernie Sanders. After the election, he was arrested for drug and alcohol issues, came out as a bisexual, and was charged with various campaign crimes. (He was acquitted.) \*

# *Florida Governor 2018-Democratic Primary*

In the primary, Gillum ran against Gwen Graham, a Congressperson and the daughter of a former Governor and Senator; Phil Levine, the Mayor of Miami Beach; Jeff Greene, a real estate entrepreneur; and several others. Graham, Levine, and Greene were the moderate candidates. Gillum was the most left-wing candidate.

	• Gillum	Graham	Levine	Greene
• Votes	517,417	472,735	306,450	151,935
• %	34.3%	31.3%	20.3%	10.1%

Gillum defeated Graham by 44,682 votes. If Florida had permitted run-off elections or used Ranked Choice Voting, one of the moderate candidates, likely Gwen Graham, would have won the nomination.

In 2018, Florida had 3,588,518 unaffiliated voters (26,8% of all voters), who were not allowed to vote in the primary..

- If only a small percentage of these people had registered with the Democratic party and voted, they would have likely supported a more moderate candidate, and Graham would have won the nomination.

## *Florida Governor 2018-Final Election*

If the final election had been Graham Vs. DeSantis, most agree that Graham would have won.

- DeSantis defeated Gillum by 32,463 votes.
- Had he been running against a moderate candidate like Graham, enough moderate voters would have likely changed enough votes to elect Graham.

**If you are an unaffiliated voter in Florida who does not like the direction the state has taken under DeSantis, think about how you could have influenced U.S. politics by registering as a Democrat and casting your vote for a moderate?**

- DeSantis would then be a footnote in history and Florida might not have new laws, like its abortion ban.

# Oregon

Oregon is another closed primary state.

- From 2014-2022, the number of unaffiliated voters increased 98.2% compared to 22.3% for Democrats and 11.5% for Republicans.
- 68.6% of all new voters registered as unaffiliated, even though this meant they could not participate in primaries.
  - Why did they register as unaffiliated and give up their rights?
- As of 2022, unaffiliated voters were the largest voting group in the state.

**The question for all the new unaffiliated voters is – given the closed primaries in Oregon, why did you decide to give up your ability to influence elections?**

Oregon Voter Registration By Party					
	Dem.	Rep.	Unaffiliated	Independent	Total
22-Jul	1,014,041	730,761	1,015,492	137,972	2,931,433
21-Jul	1,027,256	731,282	974,000	137,712	2,931,433
20-Jul	1,008,131	720,960	932,826	122,361	2,843,060
19-Jan	976,260	706,393	892,138	125,447	2,763,974
16-Aug	958,876	694,191	642,595	109,181	2,465,621
Jan-14	826,272	654,056	536,407	109,104	2,190,830
Total change	187,769	76,705	479,085	28,868	740,603
% change-2014-2022	22.26%	11.52%	98.17%	30.32%	37.17%
% of New Voters			68.6%		

# *Oregon District 5-2022 Primary*

In 2022, the newly configured 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional district in Oregon had 170,681 Democrats, 143,267 Republicans, 172,084 unaffiliated voters, and 27,241 independents.

The district was represented by six-term incumbent Kurt Schrader.

- Schrader was the 50<sup>th</sup> most bipartisan House member during the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, and a member of the Problem Solvers conference. He was one of 3 Democrats opposed to allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices, one of 6 to support allowing concealed weapons, one of 2 to vote against the American Rescue Plan. The Wall Street Journal called him “Oregon’s Joe Manchin.” In other words, Schrader was a very moderate Democrat. Despite his votes, Joe Biden endorsed him for reelection. \*

In the Democratic Primary, Jaime McLeod-Skinner, who was endorsed by Elizabeth Warren, defeated Schrader by 8,500 votes.

- 172,084 unaffiliated voters were not able to participate in the closed primary. If those who leaned Democratic had registered and voted, Schrader who was a true moderate, would likely have won.

# Oregon District 5-Final Election

In the final election, McLeod-Skinner ran against Lori Chavez-DeRemer.

- Chavez-DeRemer was a Republican who refused to acknowledge the results of the 2020 election, supported bans on abortion, and was endorsed by Trump. \*
- Chavez-DeRemer defeated McLeod-Skinner by 7,372 votes.
- This was one of the seats the Republicans were able to flip to gain control of the House of Representatives, electing a right-wing Republican to replace a moderate Democrat.
- If Schrader, a much more moderate candidate, had been the Democratic nominee, he would have likely attracted many unaffiliated voters, won the election, and kept the seat in the hands of the Democrats.

By keeping their unaffiliated status, the Democratic leaning independents in this district enabled the Democrats to nominate a “progressive” candidate, who in turn lost to a “conservative” Republican. If these Democratic leaning independents had registered Democratic and voted for Schrader, a moderate would have won and the seat would still be in Democratic hands.

## *New York -2018*

- In 2018, N.Y's 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District had 364,795 voters. 235,745 Democrats, 36,813 Republicans, 8,490 independents, and 68,696 unaffiliated voters.
- The only party with a chance of winning was the Democrats. The final election was irrelevant. The only election that counted was the Democratic Primary.
- The district was represented by Joseph Crowley, a moderate 10 term Congressman, former NYPD detective, and the #3 ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives, who was in line to succeed Nancy Pelosi.
- Crowley was challenged in the primary by a former bartender and community organizer for Bernie Sanders named Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC)
- Crowley seemed like a shoe-in. He even received the nominations of the Workers Family Party and the Women's Equality Party.

## *N.Y. 2018-Primary Election*

- In the primary election, 29,778 people voted. 12.6% of all Democrats or 9.8% if unaffiliated voters are included.
- AOC defeated Crowley by 4,018 votes.
- 68,696 unaffiliated voters would have been eligible to vote if they had registered with the Democratic party.
- Because unaffiliated voters tend to be more moderate, it is reasonable to assume that a vast majority of them would have voted for Crowley if they had registered with the Democratic party.
- If only 6% of these voters had registered with the Democratic party and voted for Crowley, he would have won.
- **Thus, AOC has gained national prominence and pushed the Democratic party to the left because unaffiliated voters sat on their hands and allowed her to defeat a strong moderate.**



# *Pennsylvania Senate Election 2022-Democrats*

In 2022, Pennsylvania had an open Senate seat created by the retirement of moderate Republican Pat Toomey.

- The Democratic primary included progressives John Fetterman and Malcolm Kenyatta, as well as moderate Conor Lamb.
- While Fetterman was Lt. Governor and had high name recognition, in his last run for Senate in 2016, he finished third with less than 20% of the vote.
- Days before the primary victory, Fetterman suffered a stroke.

Democratic primary results[106]			
Party	Candidate	Votes	%
<a href="#">Democratic</a>	<a href="#">John Fetterman</a>	<b>753,557</b>	<b>58.65%</b>
<a href="#">Democratic</a>	<a href="#">Conor Lamb</a>	337,498	26.27%
<a href="#">Democratic</a>	<a href="#">Malcolm Kenyatta</a>	139,393	10.85%
<a href="#">Democratic</a>	Alexandria Khalil	54,460	4.24%
Total votes		<b>1,284,908</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

# *Pennsylvania Senate Election-2022-Republican*

Republicans had a much more competitive campaign including among others:

- Mehmet Oz, a TV personality, citizen of Turkey, and resident of New Jersey, endorsed by Trump.\*
- David McCormick, a successful hedge fund manager, endorsed by many top economic advisors,\* and
- Kathy Barnette, a political commentator, who opposed to abortion, espoused homophobic and Islamophobic views, promoted conspiracy theories, and was endorsed by Michael Flynn. \*
- Oz won with only 31.21% of the votes and defeated McCormick by a mere 950 votes.

- In 2022, Pennsylvania had 8,601,366 registered voters.
- 925,870 (10.8%) were unaffiliated.

Mehmet Oz	420,168	31.21%
<a href="#">David McCormick</a>	419,218	31.14%
<a href="#">Kathy Barnette</a>	331,903	24.66%

- It is reasonable to assume that most of these unaffiliated voters were moderate.
- Given the political leanings of Oz and Barnette, it is reasonable to assume that if even a few of these people had registered Republican and voted, that McCormick would have easily won.

# *Pennsylvania Senate 2022-Final Election*

In the Senate campaign, Fetterman's health became a major issue. His stroke impaired his ability to speak and hear. After the election, Fetterman was hospitalized for almost 2 months for depression.

- As Pennsylvanians considered the election, they were dealing with the lesser of two evils:
  - a progressive Democrat who had serious health issues, versus
  - a TV personality and New Jersey resident, who promoted the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine for the treatment of COVID, went shopping for “crudite,” and was antiabortion. \*
- In the election, Fetterman received 51.25% of the vote and defeated Oz by 263,752.
- It is reasonable to question whether Fetterman, with his health issues, and Oz, with his myriad of issues were the best candidates at the time.
- If McCormick had been the candidate instead of Oz, he likely would have won the final election.
- If Republican “leaners” in Pennsylvania had registered and voted in the primary, the results in Pennsylvania could have been significantly different.

## *Delaware-The Right-Wing Loonies*

In 2010, to fill the seat of that had been once held by Joe Biden, Republicans had a choice. They could nominate Mike Castle, the Republican Congressman and former Governor, who was extremely well liked, or Tea Party candidate, Christine O'Donnell, of whom the Chairman of the Republican Party in Delaware stated,

- *"Is Christine O'Donnell actually this unhinged from reality? Or is she simply a liar, whose total lack of respect for Delaware voters leads her to deliberately ...deny the clear facts surrounding her many personal and professional failures. She's not a viable candidate for any office in the state of Delaware. She could not be elected dog catcher."\**
- She might not be elected dog catcher, but she did gain the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate.
- O'Donnell won the primary by 3,540 votes.
- At the time of the election, Delaware had 140,003 unaffiliated voters. If only a small percentage had registered Republican and voted, Mike Castle would have won the primary and would likely have defeated Chris Coons in the final election.
- Republican unaffiliated "leaners" gave Democrats an extra Senate seat by not registering with their party.

## *Delaware-Right-Wing Loonies Never Learn*

- In 2020, Lauren Witzke ran in the Republican primary for Senate. She supported the Proud Boys and Q'Anon, claimed the earth was flat, suggested that Hurricane Ida was a plot by the "deep state" to punish Ron DeSantis, called trans people "sexual predators," stated "*I identify more with Putin's Christian values than I do with Joe Biden.*"\*
- Witzke ran against James DeMartino, a former marine.
- Witzke won the primary by 7,634 votes.
- In 2020, the number of unaffiliated voters in Delaware was 179,882.
- These people, again, stood by while the Republicans again nominated a candidate on the far far right of the spectrum.
- Witzke was trounced in the general election, receiving less than 38% of the vote.
- Until Delaware changes its voting rules, wouldn't the state be better off if both parties nominated candidates who think the world is round.

\*Wikipedia

# *This Could Make a Difference!*

Not all primaries are disputed or offer as stark a choice as those cited on the previous slides. However:

- If Ron DeSantis had never been elected, Florida could be very different, and Trump might have a more “moderate” challenger.
- If AOC had never been elected, there might never have been a “Squad,” and the focus on the far left of the Democratic party would be much lower.
- The defeat of Kurt Schrader in Oregon sent a clear message to the Problem Solvers and the moderates in Congress: stop solving problems and focus on your base, or you will lose.
- The nomination of Dr. Oz sent a clear message to Republicans—suck up to Trump. While the election of Fetterman told Democrats opposing Trump was more important than being able to serve.

Every time a moderate is defeated by an extremist in closed primary states, other candidates and office holders get a clear message that being a moderate or showing bipartisanship does not work.

## *We Need Real Reforms*

As we stated at the beginning of this presentation, Reform Elections Now believes the only way to increase bipartisanship and elect more moderates is to change the way elections are run. We continue to focus on our goals, which include:

- Opening Primaries to all voters.
- Supporting Top 2 Non-partisan primaries and Ranked Choice Voting.
- Ending Gerrymandering, and
- Developing better voting systems that promote ease of voting with more security..

## *Unaffiliated Voters in Closed Primary States-Please Help*

However, if you are an unaffiliated voter in a closed primary state, or if you know an unaffiliated voter in a closed primary state, we ask you to help create change by registering or getting them to register with the party to which they lean or the party that has the most competitive primary.

- Unaffiliated voters are more moderate than members of the party to which they lean.
- By registering as unaffiliated, they give up their right to vote in primaries, which is often the final election.
- Many primaries are decided by small margins.
- If unaffiliated people registered and voted, they could change the results of some of these primaries and of the final elections.
- These opportunities don't come in every election or every election district.
- But when they do come, the unaffiliated voters can make a difference by registering and voting.
- We can work hard to change the system, but you can also help if you remember the rule:
- **“If you can't beat them- join them- and then beat them.”**