



Jesse Shayne Statement

New York City Votes Public Hearing-NYCCFB

December 6, 2016

New York City

My name is Jesse Shayne. I'm 24 years old, I'm a Millennial, and I'm a professional political organizer. I'm also the digital director of Open Primaries, a national 501(c)(4) nonprofit that advocates for voter empowerment.

I've long held an interest in organizing and empowering Millennials because I feel that our generation is politically marginalized and misunderstood.

The media scapegoats Millennials because we don't always show up to the polls. There's a pervasive narrative that Millennials are fickle and indecisive when it comes to politics. We're lazy. We're slacktivists. We think that political engagement need not go beyond our social media feeds.

The numbers don't lie: Millennials haven't reached their full voting potential. But despite the most basic qualitative metric suggesting otherwise, I believe that Millennials are incredibly interested in politics. From my experience, our generation is fascinated by the intersectionality of activism and social progress. Millennials have staged massive and impactful protests -- from Occupy Wall Street to the march to Trump Tower a few weeks ago. We are the most diverse generation ever, and it shows through our political discourse and the myriad ways through we express our political views. Voting is not the singular form of political expression, and Millennials know that. There are more than two ways of conceptualizing politics, and Millennials know that too.

Unfortunately, our electoral system is ill-equipped to handle the diversity of thought or expression that Millennials crave. The actual issue that the parties have with Millennials is not that they are disinterested in politics, but that they won't turn out lock and step and vote for the lesser of two evils. We refuse to be a part of a system that we recognize as being broken and corrupted. We should not be condemned by the media or scolded by Baby Boomers for that.

Millennials crave substance and originality of thought. The parties are sorely lacking both. That's precisely why half of Millennials refuse to identify with a political party altogether, including 59 percent of those ages 18 to 29 who are registered independent.

OPEN PRIMARIES

Unfortunately, however, our electoral system does not reward originality of thought or commitment to social progress. It instead empowers the next entitled partisan hack waiting in line for a seat. We all saw how that worked out for Hillary Clinton earlier this year.

Her primary opponent, Senator Bernie Sanders brought millions of Millennials out of the woodwork to vote this year. He ran as political outsider on a platform of change and inclusiveness and was a proverbial breath of fresh air in a stiflingly stale political climate. Yet, in New York, thousands of Millennials were unable to vote for him because of our restrictive and unfair electoral process, including the earliest change of party affiliation deadline in the country. He was stopped dead in his tracks by a party that has too much control over the election process.

The fact that Millennials didn't turn out in the general elections this year ought to be a wakeup call to the parties; so too should the fact that our generation -- the biggest voting bloc in the country -- refuses to register with a party at a record-high rate.

How can the parties possibly expect us to turn out in the general election when half of us are excluded from the primary? Especially not when you consider the fact that our districts are so gerrymandered that 90 percent of elections are determined in the primary. If we can't have a say in who gets nominated to run for president, why would we turn out to vote for our state assemblymen?

Opening the primaries won't solve everything overnight, but it's a start. A few years ago, California was one of the most dysfunctional states in the country with some of the most uncompetitive elections. They passed a reform measure for top-two open primaries and everything changed. Now, California has some of the most competitive elections in the country and an incredibly diverse representation. They just elected the second-ever black woman to the US Senate, and membership of the Hispanic Congressional Delegation and California Black Caucus have increased by 50% since top-two was introduced.

The future of our country rests on a political system that recognizes that there are more than two forms of thought, and more than one way to express our political preferences. The future of our country rests with Millennials, and the fact that half of them refuse to identify with a political party should be a real warning sign for the parties. We are the most diverse generation ever, and as the biggest voting bloc, we hold the key to the future of our politics. It's time that the 50 percent of Millennials and 43 percent of Americans who can't vote in the primary are allowed to vote. It's time for the parties to recognize that the current system is unsustainable, and that Americans won't be compelled to vote through fear and intimidation. It's time for one person, one vote to be upheld universally. Thank you.