

# OPEN PRIMARIES

## Testimony of Jeremy Gruber, SVP of Open Primaries Interim Topic Testimony Before the Wyoming State Corporations Committee

Mr Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this morning. My name is Jeremy Gruber and I am the SVP of Open Primaries-we are a national nonpartisan organization that conducts research and educates the public about primary election systems. We work with citizens, nonprofits and legislators across the country on how to improve elections to operate in the best interests of voters and to serve as a resource in this discussion

We have been following this important debate in Wyoming and I'm here to support and encourage study and analysis on ways to improve the primary election process to ensure it is as fair, equitable and meaningful as possible.

Wyoming voters are smart. They want a meaningful experience at the polls and when they don't find it because elections are uncompetitive and candidate choice is limited, they stop participating-Wyoming suffers from chronic low voter turnout with average registered voter participation at 31%, less than a third of registered voters. That includes more than 62,000 registered Republicans who did not turn out to vote in the Republican primary in 2020.

It also includes the state's 36,000 registered independent voters-the fastest growing group of voters in the state, already 15% of the electorate and at current rates of growth projected to pass registered Democrats as the second largest group of voters in the next ten years. Independents are second class voters in Wyoming.

The lack of engagement by so many Wyoming voters-of all stripes-matters because primary elections are increasingly the most important elections in the state-In the last cycle, 63% of Wyoming races were decided in the primary. Primary elections, just like the general election, are public elections-they are paid for by every citizen taxpayer and administered by the state.

Wyoming is by no means alone here though. Uncompetitive elections and low voter turnout are endemic in states across the country.

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Wyoming is, though, one of only a handful of states with what is called a semi-closed primary system- where unaffiliated voters may register with a party at the polls on primary election day to vote in that party's primary. Just six states have this form of primary-none of them are Wyoming's neighbors.

This study topic is an opportunity to change that by analyzing voter registration, participation and other data and devising a solution specific to the needs of Wyoming voters. Many states are already going through this process. In the last few years, several have already made significant changes to their primary elections, inc Alaska and Colorado. At least a third of all states in the country are now actively studying how to improve their primary elections.

The solutions many of these states are considering-more open and nonpartisan primaries -are among several practical, cost-effective solutions to the problems Wyoming voters have with the current semi-closed primary system. The goal of this study topic would be to analyze the data and study whether changes to the current system could increase voter participation, allow voters to vote for the best candidate, improve voter choice overall and make elections more meaningful for voters.

Most importantly it would be to make recommendations on improvements that are in the best interest of Wyoming voters.

I encourage you to consider this topic and we are happy to support and be a resource in any way that would be helpful. I'm available to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.