

**Testimony by Kevin Soubly before
The Presidential Commission on Election Administration**
September 4, 2013
Philadelphia, PA

Good afternoon. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to address this Commission.

On Election Day, I represent myself: one independent, non-partisan vote. But today in front of this Commission I represent those of my generation (referred to colloquially as millennials) who identify not as a Republican or Democrat but simply as free-minded, educated, opinionated, concerned American citizens. Come Election Day, we desire to vote for our preferred candidate(s) based on their merits and our opinions alone.

We should not have to ally with or against a particular party for the right to cast a ballot, as we do in Arizona. We should not have to declare an oath to anything but our country to vote, as we do in Georgia. We should not have to settle for a vote against an unwanted candidate instead of a vote for a preferred candidate, as is often the case in Michigan. Indeed, by all appearances these problems with election administration are violations of our constitutional right to freedom of speech and association.

Perhaps you are aware of a recent article in *The Atlantic* by Ron Fournier: *The Outsiders: How Can Millennials Change Washington If They Hate It?* on the apparent rejection en masse of the US political system by my generation. If not, I highly recommend reading it.

Here are some notable statistics quoted by the article: nearly half of my generation agree that “politics has become too partisan” (up 2 points since 2010). Nearly one-third agree that “political involvement rarely has any tangible results” (up 5 points). Only 16% disagree that “politics today are no longer able to meet the challenges our country is facing.” And 45% describe their political affiliation as Independent (up 6 points since 2008).

Again, nearly half of my generation belongs to no political party - but this does not mean we are apathetic. We are, in fact, more involved in community betterment than ever, though through social institutions other than government.

What does this have to do with election administration and this esteemed Commission? Everything. Your ultimate mission is, after all, “to ensure that all eligible voters have the opportunity to cast their ballots without undue delay” (according to President Obama’s Executive Order calling for this Commission). Prohibition from casting a vote based on political affiliation is a clear impairment of this “opportunity” to cast a ballot you have been charged to ensure.

Independents are here today just as we’ve been in August and July and June, voicing our concerns. We are structurally prohibited from casting our ballots in some states, and this failure must be addressed!

For better or for worse, my generation is the future. Access to voting is the most fundamental aspect of political participation. Being blocked from it causes disillusionment with both major political parties and our country's current system of democratic political process. We all desire a stronger government, society, and country. So include us and we will help! In fact, we demand inclusion, we deserve no less, and the future of our country depends on it.

Raising the level of voter turnout on Election Day is difficult enough, as any political activist is aware. But the purposeful exclusion of voters simply due to their political non-affiliation is additionally disruptive. The result? America's growing political gridlock within a system of partisan polarity, cyclically reinforcing itself.

Continuing this system cannot and will not yield improvements. It leads only to continued breakdowns and disillusionment, especially for those unaffiliated 45 percent of my generation; America's future leaders. This is a problem; this is a fundamental threat to our democracy. In our era of unparalleled and even existential policy challenges, we need greater inclusion and participation, not continued barriers.

I look forward to reading your final report to President Obama in a few months. Please, address this issue of political affiliation, prohibited access, and stifled freedom of speech in that report. Include the strong and growing voice of America's non-partisan voters and advocate for a more open and inclusive voting process for all American voters.

We're counting on you.

Thank you.