



## **HOW OHIO CURRENTLY DETERMINES POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND ITS AFFECT UPON THE MINOR PARTY AND INDEPENDENTS ABILITY TO RUN FOR OFFICE**

*By Don Shrader*

First and foremost, it is incumbent on the voters in Ohio that they understand how Ohio currently determines party membership and the constraints that this places on voters as well as candidates for political office. Without this understanding, there will be no motivation for change.

First of all, unlike some other states, one does not register in Ohio with the Board of Elections or the Secretary of State as a member of a political party. When one registers to vote in Ohio there is no place to register for party membership or affiliation.

While a person can affiliate with any political party based upon that party's bylaws for membership, joining or affiliating with a party does not currently make one a recognized member of that party by the State. The only way a voter becomes a formal member of a political party in Ohio is by voting in that party's primary elections. When a person goes to the polls to do his or her civic duty (as we older persons were taught in school) and votes in the primary elections, the person states to the election officials in which party primary he or she is voting. That registers that person as a member of that party for the next two years.

Different political parties in Ohio, particularly minor parties, have different procedures for formally aligning with that party, but those procedures are up to the party. While filling out a membership application, for instance, may make your interest known to that party's leadership, NOTE that it DOES NOT make you an official registered member of that party with the Ohio Secretary of State's Office. That can only be done only by "pulling" a ballot for that party during the Ohio State primary elections. IF the party has no candidates running in the elections in that particular voting precinct or on a statewide ballot, then one cannot pull a primary ballot for that party and thus is unable to switch parties.

Currently, if a person votes in a political party's primary, they are then considered by the Secretary of State's Office to be a member of that party. As such, for two-years following that vote, the voter cannot sign a petition of someone running as a candidate in a different party. Thus, if a political party

candidate is running for office, it requires that he or she obtain the required number of VALID signatures of registered voters who did NOT vote in another party's primary within the past two years. (

Too often, other than teenagers who recently turned 18 and who were not eligible to vote during the previous primary election, the voters who are eligible to sign a candidate's petition because they did not vote in previous primaries are those who are generally politically unmotivated and disinterested in participating in the political process at any level.

As the Ohio Election Law now stands, being a recognized minor party holds a tremendous advantage in that for most elective State and Federal Offices, minor party candidates need only 25 valid signatures of registered voters who have not voted in another party's primary in the last two years (compared to 50 for a major party candidate); for many local and regional offices it is only 5 for a minor party candidate (compared to 10 for a major party candidate). Candidates affiliated with non-recognized parties (such as all minor parties will likely become now that SB 193 has been allowed to stand) must run as independent candidates unless his or her affiliated party gathers the sufficient number of signatures to gain official recognition as a political party. Independent candidates must obtain the number of signatures equal to at least 1% of the vote in the political district for which office they are seeking, which for Congress, for instance, can be in the thousands of signatures.

However, for everyone that did their civic duty of voting in a primary election, either as conscientious citizens and/or to try to get the best Republican or Democratic candidate on the ballot, they are now unable to sign a nominating petition of another party's candidate for a period of two years and then only by NOT VOTING in any party's primary, or voting only in the primary of the political party they are certain to endorse in the future – **IF** there is a candidate running in that primary, which as of 2015 can only be a Green Party candidate as all other minor parties have now been obviated.

A candidate for office can change his or her party affiliation by filing a valid election petition for another party (if it is a recognized Party by the State which now includes only the Green, Democrats, and Republicans) and thereby run as a different party's candidate but the VOTER CANNOT change parties via any kind of notification to the Board of Elections or other state entity. (Constitution Party candidates running for office in 2014 who had run for the same office as a major party candidate in the past stated that it was much-much harder to obtain 25 signatures of voters who had not voted in another party's primary in the past two

years than it was obtain the needed signatures as a major party candidate when so many of their friends were already affiliated with that party but were now unable to sign the nominating petition of the Constitution Party candidate even though they intrinsically supported the candidate.)

In Ohio, if a person supports an officially recognized minor political party that does not have any candidates on the primary ballot in that person's political subdivision, the only way the voter can gather signatures for or even sign a minor party candidate's nominating petition two years hence is by **NOT VOTING** in any other party's upcoming primary elections – major or minor. If there are issues for which one wishes to vote, the voter can obtain an "Issues Only" ballot but if one pulls a party ballot, even to vote for only one candidate, then that person is DENIED the ability to sign another party candidate's petition for the next two years. NOT voting in any party's primary election will then allow one to sign a nominating petition, or gather signatures, for a candidate in another party after the two years from the last time that person voted in a party's primary.

It should be noted that most people who have subsequently checked with the Board of Elections (BoE) after NOT voting in the last primary or last few primary elections have found that the BoE still considers them to be members of the party in whose primary they last voted. Thus, voting in the Primaries limits your future rights and freedoms to actively support the candidate of your choice. It has been reported that one way a person may be able to remove his name from any party affiliation at the BoE is to go to the BoE and have one's name removed as a registered voter. Later, return to the BoE and register a new as a voter which, as noted above, does not include registering an affiliation with any party.