

Democrats on North Carolina election board block Cornel West from appearing on presidential ballot

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With Joe Biden continuing to fall in the polls, the Democratic Party is doing everything in its power to block any independent, left-wing or third party candidacy. As part of what Democratic Party officials themselves have called an “all-out war” on third parties, on Tuesday the Democrat-controlled North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) voted to reject thousands of petitions for the Justice for All Party (JFA) and block the party from appearing on the ballot in North Carolina this November.

In the 3-2 vote, the three Democrats on the board voted as a bloc to reject recognizing JFA, which is running Dr. Cornel West, an opponent of the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, as its presidential candidate. This is despite the fact that the party submitted over 17,140 signed and verified petitions, over 3,200 more than the 13,865 required by state law.

The vote to ban West from the ballot was completely undemocratic and underscored the fraudulent character of Biden’s claims to be running as a bulwark of democracy against the fascist Donald Trump.

While the board did not grant party/ballot status to JFA, in a 4-1 decision the NCSBE did admit We the People Party (WTP), which has nominated Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a stalwart defender of Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians, as its candidate. WTP submitted over 18,400 signatures, over 4,500 more than the minimum amount.

Both parties submitted more signatures than required prior to the June 1 deadline. Nevertheless, last month, after complaints about the petitions were raised to the board by the North Carolina State Democratic Party and a Democratic Party-aligned super PAC, Clear Choice Action, Democrats on the board refused to grant party status to JFA or WTP.

Clear Choice was created earlier this year following six-figure donations by Democratic Party billionaire boosters Reid Hoffman (LinkedIn) and Ronald Conway, a venture capitalist.

Alan Hirsch, the chairman of the NCSBE, confirmed that as part of its investigation into JFA the board requested from JFA “documentation,” including “the names and contact information of all the organizers and petitions circulators” for JFA and a group called People over Parties (POP), which collected signatures on behalf of JFA independently of the party.

In something of a Freudian slip, Hirsch said, “We have two

different, we are examining each of these political parties differently. So, separately, rather.”

Throughout the hearing, not a single board member raised the fact that as part of the initial complaints, entities seeking to invalidate WTP and JFA petitions sent harassing text messages to signatories with bogus surveys. The surveys asked leading questions with the aim of influencing signatories to recant their support for the third party candidates.

These voter suppression tactics were ignored at the hearing. Nor was any information presented to demonstrate that either WTP or JFA had submitted a high enough number of fraudulent signatures to indicate that their petitions no longer met the minimum requirement. In fact, employees for the board could identify only 18 people out of 250 they attempted to contact who allegedly said they did not recall signing a petition for JFA. The board did not publicly identify any people who claimed to have not signed the WTP petition.

Nevertheless, Democratic Party board member Siobhan Millen voted to block both JFA and WTP from appearing on the ballot. In her comments, Millen argued that the WTP and JFA were not “actually parties.”

Millen claimed that both Kennedy Jr. and West were trying to “circumvent North Carolina law,” which requires independent candidates who do not run on a party line to gather signatures equal to 1.5 percent of registered North Carolina voters, or over 83,000 signatures, this election cycle.

Rebutting Millen, Republican board member Kevin Lewis said, “I don’t think we really need to hunt for what is a political party because the general assembly” defined a party in the statute as “a group of voters who have filed the correct number of petitions.”

Lewis noted that both parties filed “in excess” of the required number of petitions to form new parties and that the ones “called into question fall well short of reducing the number of petitions below the requirements.”

Fellow Republican board member Stacy Eggers IV concurred with Lewis, saying that:

... the legislature has expressed a preference that candidates run as party affiliates and not independents. You can disagree with that process, but that is the process. It sounds like other states in the nation do this very same thing, which really begs the question why are we sitting here today trying to prohibit ballot access for legitimate candidates who are seeking office?

From the numbers that we have, We the People Party is 4,544 validated signatures over the requirement and Justice for All is 3,276 validated signatures over the requirement...

The bottom line becomes these parties have the necessary signatures and must be approved. And that's where I believe Mr. Lewis and I have been before, and I don't believe the information presented through the review of this by staff presents anything different. So I think we are bound to approve these parties whether we like the candidates running or not. Or whether we intend to vote for them or whether we are concerned they are going to take votes away from one of our preferred candidates. The bottom line is that they have the necessary signatures, and they are entitled to approval.

While he did vote to approve WTP, Chairman Hirsch, a Democrat, claimed he still thought there had been "subterfuge" and that if an entity wanted to "take it to court," it would have a "good case."

Turning to JFA, Hirsch said that JFA petitioners submitted only 4,000 signatures, while outside groups, such as People over Parties (POP), submitted the rest. Hirsch said he was "limited in what I can say" but claimed there was an "investigation of fraud with respect to collection of signatures" by POP.

Eggers noted that a multi-week investigation by the board into signatures submitted by JFA found only 30 "folks who said they did not sign," which "still leaves this fishing expedition with another 3,276 to go." Eggers noted that North Carolina state law did not limit parties from hiring or using signature gatherers.

Board member Lewis likewise noted that the board was making a decision to block a party "based on talking to 49 people" out of over 17,000 who signed.

Democratic board member Jeff Carmon said that he had "no confidence that this was done legitimately" and that the "failure of this outside group to give us that simple information simply adds to the story."

After Carmon's statements, the Democrats voted not to accept the petitions for the Justice For All Party, invalidating the democratic rights of some 7.4 million registered North Carolina voters.

In a statement posted on his X/Twitter account, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president Joseph Kishore denounced the Democrats' decision to block West from the ballot.

Kishore wrote:

Despite our deep and unbridgeable political differences with Cornel West, the Socialist Equality Party supports his and other independent and third parties' democratic right to appear on the ballot. In voting to keep West off the ballot in North Carolina, the Democratic Party has once again made it clear it has nothing to do with "defending democracy" or democratic rights, in the United States or anywhere else.

Kishore added:

To wage war abroad requires the suppression of democratic rights at home. This shared agenda of the Democratic and Republican parties—genocide in Gaza, war in Ukraine and future conflict in the Indo-Pacific, coupled with increasing attacks on the working conditions and living standards of the working class domestically—is widely hated by masses of people. Yet this opposition finds no expression in the corporate-controlled electoral system.

The defense of democratic rights is impossible without a frontal assault on the wealth and privileges of the financial oligarchy and the capitalist system.



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