Gingrich, Perry fail to qualify for Virginia Republican ballot

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In a stark demonstration of the unrepresentative and undemocratic character of the US two-party electoral system, Republican Party officials in the state of Virginia announced last week that only two of seven active candidates for the party's presidential nomination had qualified for ballot status in the state's primary election set for March 6, 2012.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Texas Governor Rick Perry both filed petitions with between 11,000 and 12,000 signatures to meet the state requirement of 10,000 signatures of registered voters. After the elimination of ineligible and non-registered voters, both campaigns fell short of the 10,000 requirement.

Three other Republican presidential candidates—Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann, former US Senator Rick Santorum, and former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman—did not even attempt to gain ballot status in Virginia, the 12th largest US state by population.

The State Board of Elections is expected to approve a ballot at its meeting December 28 that will include only former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and Congressman Ron Paul, whose campaigns did file petitions with more than 10,000 valid signatures.

The Gingrich campaign initially declared it would seek write-in status, apparently unaware that Virginia does not permit write-in candidates in primary elections. Later, a spokesman said the campaign was considering a lawsuit, although with little likelihood of success.

That a supposedly major political campaign can be dismissed so easily speaks volumes about the nature of the US political system. Gingrich had been leading in the polls in Virginia, with 30 percent of likely voters in the Republican primary saying they would support him, compared to 25 percent for Romney.

This "frontrunner" status was not the result of any genuine popular groundswell of support for the former House speaker, a truly repugnant political figure who has been out of office for 14 years, raking in millions as a high-priced pitchman for various corporate interests.

The Gingrich campaign proved unable to carry out the task of collecting 10,000 valid signatures in Virginia, with the additional requirement of a geographical distribution across the state, with at least 400 signatures from each of the 11 congressional districts. There was an additional obstacle, a ban on out-of-state petition gatherers.

Unable to mobilize local supporters in the state where he has long made his residence, Gingrich relied on paid signature gatherers, reimbursed at the rate of $1.50 per signature, an effort that yielded just over 11,000 signatures. This $16,000 investment proved unavailing, however, as did similar resources thrown into a petition drive to place Texas Governor Perry on the ballot.

Bachmann, Santorum and Huntsman, more hard-pressed in terms of resources, did not spend the money or the time to mount a petition drive in Virginia, effectively ceding the state to the better-financed campaigns.

The crass financial calculations and the crude ballot-rigging that has resulted is a demonstration of the real nature of the US political system. The various candidates do not represent genuine mass constituencies, but rather rival blocks of money, as sections of the corporate elite invest in one or another potential officeholder.

This applies to both parties, the Democrats as much as the Republicans, with President Obama's reelection campaign expected to be the first to raise and spend more than $1 billion, more than 50 times the amount

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spent on presidential campaigns only two decades ago.

In the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination, the uniformly right-wing candidates have risen and fallen, and in some cases disappeared outright, on the basis of prowess in fundraising and showings in the polls, which are largely driven by the corporate media.

First Bachmann, then Perry, then Herman Cain and now Gingrich has been anointed the “frontrunner,” without a single vote being cast and without any of them showing broad popular support.

Perry, for example, was touted as a leading candidate solely because of his huge fundraising, more than $17 million in the last reporting period, but turned out to be tongue-tied and ignorant when compelled to appear on stage with his rivals.

Romney has been able to avoid such ups and downs only because, as a lesser member of the financial aristocracy, worth an estimated $250 million to $500 million, he is automatically regarded as a “credible” candidate since he can self-finance the primary campaign.

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